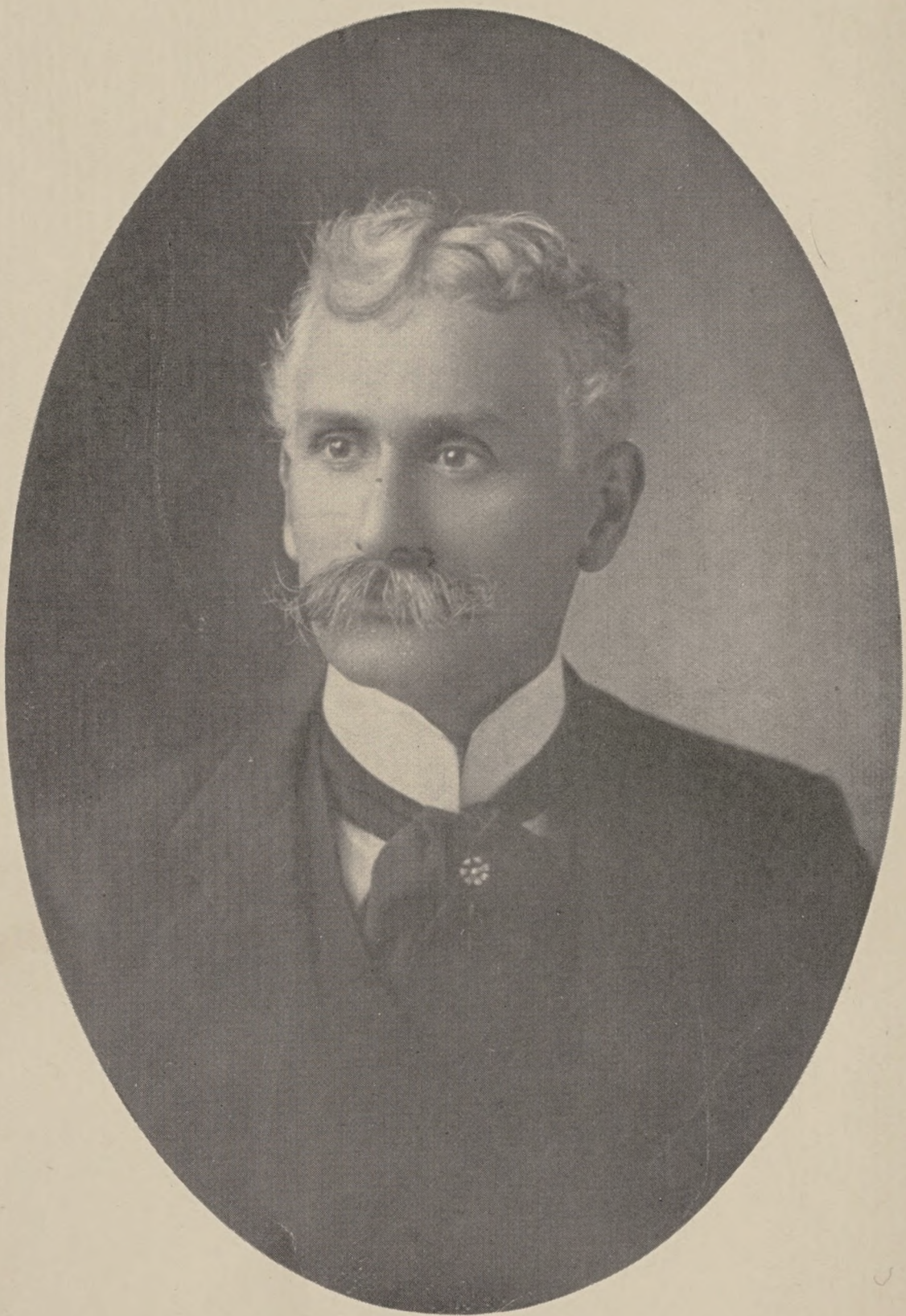

Will N. Harben

The Woman Who Trusted

A STORY OF LITERARY LIFE IN NEW YORK

BY WILL N. HARBEN

AUTHOR OF

"Northern Georgia Sketches," "White Marie," etc., etc.

HENRY ALTEMUS COMPANY

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W. N. H.

DEDICATED

TO MY NIECE

MISS NELLIE HARBEN KNIGHT.

THE WOMAN WHO TRUSTED.

CHAPTER I.

THE store belonging to the cotton factory of Dadeville stood on a hill away from the sound of the whirring spindles, the puff, puff of steam, and the monotonous jarring of the looms. The hillsides around the typical Southern store were dotted with the cottages of mill people.

Jasper Burian, who lived in the old-fashioned, two-storied frame house in the town half a mile farther southward, was the storekeeper. Twice a year Jasper went to New York to select his stock, consisting of articles of general merchandise. He bought the produce of the farms near by, and shipped it to the larger cities.

A man of fifty-six, he was somewhat broken in spirit and physique. The war had taken from him his fortune, his fine old cotton plantation and

his retinue of slaves. In their stead the war had given him blindness in one eye, an incurable wound in his right leg, and a rather morose disposition. He was but a wreck of the once fine Southern gentleman whose courtesy and hospitality were known for miles around.

Capricious fortune had left him with but two ambitions. One was that, by some unlooked-for turn of events, he might become a director in the mill. The other was that his son, Wilmot, twenty-eight years of age, who had been graduated at the State University, and had taken up the study of law, might distinguish himself in that profession, as had his grandfather, Judge Wilmot Burian, of Savannah.

The first ambition could now hardly be called an ambition for in secretly speculating in cotton "futures" Jasper had lost so heavily that he was forced to sell the greater portion of his factory stock, and no one but a considerable shareholder could hope to be made a director.

This disappointment in itself was hard enough to bear, but when the first term of District Court had ended, after the admittance of his son to the bar, and Wilmot had not secured a single case, the storekeeper began to fear that even his last hope might never be realized. He went into

Dadeville one morning, called on Mr. Thornton Bivings, the old lawyer under whom Wilmot had studied law, and frankly asked if Wilmot was likely to succeed in his profession.

"I think," answered the lawyer, "that he would do pretty well if he could be made to care more for it; he has a good head, Mr. Burian—a good head for law, but I don't somehow feel that he is exactly cut out for it. This office, for instance, may be full of lawyers discussing important decisions, and Wilmot will be as quiet as dormouse; but let the conversation drift on to literature, the writings of the old poets and masters of prose, and he will fire up like an arc lamp under a current of electricity."

That night after supper Jasper Burian rose to follow his son to his room.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Burian from her working-table.

"Up stairs to see what that boy is doing," was the short reply. "I want to find out why he sits up so late. The watchman at the mill told me he could see a light in his room every night till past twelve o'clock."

"I don't believe I'd bother him," said Mrs. Burian; "he is usually busy with his books and writing."

"What kind of writing?" Burian paused, his hand on the railing of the stairs.

Mrs. Burian bent over her needle-work. She had already satisfied her own curiosity in regard to her son's nocturnal employment by surreptitiously looking over the carefully written sheets of manuscript which he usually left in his table-drawer during the day.

"I think," she said reluctantly, "that he may write things now and then for that little paper, the *Echo*. He had a letter yesterday from the editor."

"What kind of things does he write?" asked Burian in a tone of blended disappointment and contempt.

"I think they are little stories, I'm not sure."

"I know they are, mamma," broke in Laura Burian, a girl of seventeen, as she entered the room. "He never would show me anything, but one day I saw a short story in the *Echo*, which sounded so much like brother that I asked him if he wrote it. He got mighty red in the face and said that Harold Carrolton was signed to it. Then I pretended to believe he hadn't written it, and told him I was glad it wasn't his, as it was the poorest piece in the paper. Then he looked so serious I knew I had caught up with him."

With a grunt of disgust Jasper Burian turned up the stairs. What he had heard angered him. He was not a great lover of books in general, and with novels he had little patience. He had, in all his life, met but one writer of fiction. She was the sister of the editor of the *County Headlight*, a very unattractive old maid, who invariably made the deeds of her ancestors the motive for her thin sketches and burthened her work with the trunk, roots, and branches, of her family tree. Jasper had known a dozen people who had ceased to support the paper because of the space her endless creations occupied in it. That his only son should ever become such an imbecile had never before come into his mind.

He entered Wilmot's room rather unceremoniously. The young man's face appeared strange in the white light of the German student lamp; he looked tired; dark rings were under his eyes, the black pupils of which seemed to gleam unnaturally as he raised them from the manuscript before him.

"What is it, father?" he asked.

Burian advanced, laid an unsteady hand on the edge of the table, and looked down into his son's face.

"I have heard something I don't like a bit,"

he blurted out. "Your mother and sister tell me you write stories for that paper, the *Echo*."

The young man clasped his hands behind his head and leaned back, smiling good-naturedly.

"I don't write many for it; the trouble is the editor won't accept them often; it is only now and then that one proves good enough."

"Does he pay you?"

The eyes of the young man were lowered to his manuscript.

"He doesn't pay anyone; he can't afford it. He doesn't charge me for the paper." A faint smile played for an instant about Wilmot's lips, then a sort of embarrassed twitching conquered it as the stare of his father hardened.

"Well, what under the sun do you do it for?" was the missile discharged by the explosion of Jasper's wrath.

Wilmot always pitied his father when he saw him angry. The empty socket under the scarred brow was now red as blood; Burian's attitude of resting his weight on his sound leg and the commanding tone of voice reminded Wilmot that his parent had once engaged in another sort of struggle than that of a writer. He rose respectfully.

"I suppose," he said pacifically, "that it is

owing to my unconquerable love for writing. I like to see my things printed and to know that they stand a chance of being read by even a few appreciative people. I can't help feeling that if I stick to it I may some day do much better work and perhaps earn something by it."

"And all the money I have spent on educating you that you may make a use of your grandfather's library will go for nothing—all the time you have read under Mr. Bivings is to be thrown away."

The young man's tone when he replied was humble and gentle.

"I did not really know, to be frank, that I was so ill-suited to the practice of law till I was admitted to the Bar. I begin to hope that I may really accomplish something in the profession of literature and that is why I am trying to educate myself to—"

"Educate the devil!" stormed the ex-soldier; as he left the room. "Do you consider writing for a one-horse paper that can't pay a cent for your labor educating yourself? I'd be ashamed to talk such nonsense to a man as old as I am."

CHAPTER II.

ONE Spring morning Wilmot received an important letter.

He was at the post-office, surrounded by a crowd waiting for the opening of the mail. Two or three friends spoke to him, but he did not hear them, and their faces appeared almost as faces appear in dreams. He was experiencing a sensation that is felt by only a few mortals. He stepped to the door of the post-office and looked out upon the long avenue which ended on a red hillside beyond which rose a rugged mountain.

He drew a deep, full breath, and as he stepped down to the pavement something within him made him feel as light as a balloon. At the corner he met Mr. Bivings.

"Any mail for me?" the old man asked.

With trembling fingers Wilmot sorted out the letters and papers addressed to the lawyer, keeping the treasure he had just received folded in his hand.

"What's the matter?" asked Mr. Bivings. You look excited."

"Only a little piece of good news, that's all,"

answered the young man; "I'll tell you about it later."

They parted. Wilmot, instead of going to the law office as usual, turned down the principal avenue of the town. He still felt as if his body were imponderable. He had an almost uncontrolable impulse to stop and chat with the school children he met on the way, to tease the dogs which barked at him as he passed.

Half a mile from the postoffice he came to an old-fashioned two-storied residence with a long balcony and Corinthian columns, a sharply sloping roof and small-paned dormer windows. It stood on a wide, green lawn, shaded by densely foliaged water-oaks. As he neared the gate he walked more slowly, keeping his eyes fixed on the wide front doorway.

She'd think it strange of me to call so early in the day," he said to himself, "and yet she'd want to know, and I don't feel like waiting till evening."

He paused, and stood hesitatingly at the gate. Then his heart bounded. He had caught sight of a figure among the rosebushes near the glass-roofed hot-house. He entered the garden.

The girl turned as he approached. Her arms were full of roses: she laid them on a rustic

bench to offer him her hand. She was tall and graceful; her hair was a light brown that turned golden in the spring sunshine; her eyes were hazel, long-lashed, and held a deep, dreamy expression.

"You take me by surprise," she said with a welcoming smile. "I thought you might come this evening, but—" She paused, studying his face attentively, "what has happened? Oh, I know; you have had good news! You see how well I read your face. Tell me about it. Am I a good guesser?"

He smiled and nodded. "Yes, I have had a little literary success, and I owe it all to you, Muriel, for you have done more to keep my courage up than anyone."

"Don't talk nonsense, Wilmot," she said, coloring a little as she sat down on the bench. She heaped the roses in her lap, and motioned him to sit beside her. "You would have gone on writing if the whole world had opposed it—it is in you, and will force itself out like confined steam; but what news have you?"

He enjoyed her show of tender interest so much that he refrained from satisfying her curiosity for several minutes.

"I have never confessed it before," he began

presently; "but about three months ago I stopped sending my stories to the *Echo* and began offering them to the standard magazines."

"And kept it from me, Wilmot," exclaimed Miss Fairchild reproachfully; "I am awfully sorry you did not have sufficient con—"

Wilmot interrupted her with an apologetic motion of his hand, and a laugh. "They kept coming back so systematically that I was really ashamed for you to know it."

"I thought you were still trying to please that stupid editor of the *Echo*," said Miss Fairchild. "It always pained me to see your work there; the paper has no circulation worthy of mention, and the editor never would pay you for your trouble."

"He stopped printing my stories even when I gave them to him," answered Wilmot with a dry laugh. "The last I sent him has been in his hands for two months, but I am now glad he did not take it, for it has just been accepted by the *Decade*, one of the best American magazines. They have sent me a check for one hundred dollars.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" exclaimed the girl, as she took the open letter and the check from his extended hand. When she had read them, she folded

them together with almost reverent fingers. "I know I am quite as happy over this as you are," she said. "I congratulate you with all my heart, but I really don't quite understand how the editor of the *Echo* could still be retaining the manuscript, when the same story has been bought by the *Decade*."

"Fortunately I had kept a rough draft of it," explained Wilmot; "and, as he would not answer any of my communications in regard to the story, I copied it off and offered it to the *Decade* about four weeks ago. This check is the result of my faith in the tale."

"I should want the editor who ignored it to see it in the big magazine, and to see the check also," said the girl, kindling.

Then she paused, and neither spoke for a moment. "I suppose," she presently continued, her face clouding over, "that this success will decide you to give up the law, and go to New York. I don't like to think of your leaving Dadeville, but I am certain that you could succeed up there."

"I feel a little more like it now, I admit," answered Wilmot. "I have had another letter from Chester. He refuses to advise me, but says that he is doing well, and that there is always room at the top. He likes you, and always mentions you in his letters."

"He is one of the nicest men I know," answered the girl. "He was kind to me while I was in New York. Oh, I do hope papa will consent to my returning this fall! Madame Angier wrote him the other day that I was her most promising pupil. She said I had really a wonderful voice for the training I have had."

"If only we could be there together," answered Wilmot, "it would be awfully jolly. I may throw up everything and make a break for Bohemian liberty; this check may really be the pebble to turn the stream of my life."

"Don't call it a pebble, you vain boy," laughed Miss Fairchild, "a check like that is not a pebble, even to professional writers. I know some of them and have heard them talk about prices for magazine work."

"I don't mean that," he said quickly; "I assure you that I had rather have received it than—"

"Than to be made President of the mills, or sit on the Bench of the Supreme Court," broke in the girl.

"My egotism extends that far," admitted Wilmot.

"That's the way to feel," but what was the name of the story?"

"'The Fallen Idol'—a simple tale about—"

"How remarkable!" interrupted Muriel. "There is a story in this week's *Echo* by that title. I did not read it. I only glanced at the heading."

"My *nom de plume* was not signed to it?" Wilmot said, his face becoming rigid.

"I don't know; I did not look; I only saw the title. Have you not seen the paper?"

Wilmot shook his head. The hand which held the letter from the editor of the *Decade* was trembling. The girl wondered over the surpressed tensity of his tone as he answered:

"He has stopped sending me the paper—have you—could I see it?"

"It's in the library; I'll get it."

He glanced up the avenue; his heart began a prayer that what he feared might not prove true, and yet—

The girl came out, gazing at the paper as she crossed the veranda. He fixed her with a steady stare as she approached.

"It is mine!" he said huskily, "I see it in your face."

"The name was in such small type that it escaped my notice this morning," said she. "But does it really make any difference?"

"It is everything to me," he answered bitterly. "It completely annuls the acceptance from the *Decade*."

"You mean—" The girl sat down by him, a perplexed frown wrinkling her high brow.

"The editor of the *Decade* has bought it with the understanding that his magazine alone will have the use of it. If he had known that it has appeared elsewhere he would never have taken it."

"Can nothing be done, Wilmot? Oh, I am so, so sorry!"

"Absolutely nothing, Muriel. It is likely that he'd never see it in the *Echo* (and if I were dishonest I could let him publish it in his magazine), but it is plainly my duty to return his check with an explanation."

The girl gazed fixedly at him for a moment.

"I have never been so strongly tempted to give bad advice," she said. "It seems too hard; it is cruel, cruel! It meant so much to you. A moment ago you were all aglow with hope and enthusiasm, and now— Oh, it's too bad!"

"I may never have another opportunity so good," Wilmot answered.

"You must continue to work on your novel," said the girl, consolingly. "I have so much faith in it! Do you know the characters and their ac-

tions follow me everywhere. I can't keep them out of my mind. Its going to be a strong story —a very strong story!"

His heart sank as the thought came to him that she was trying to make him view his defeat as something other than it was.

He rose, smiling mechanically. "It is awfully sweet to have you comfort me, Muriel. Do you know you—it seems to me that you are the only really true friend I have. Everyone else throws cold water on my plans and hopes."

"I understand." She said it with tightening lips.

She accompanied him to the gate. Her face still wore an anxious expression. He knew she was taking no thought of herself by the heedless manner in which she pressed her fresh-cut flowers to her side. He opened the gate and gave her his hand over the fence.

"I shall return the check to-day," he said. "It's just my luck, Muriel; don't bother about me. I am not worthy of it."

"Oh I'd like to talk to him—to give him a piece of my mind!" she suddenly exclaimed, and he noticed that a rebellious fire had kindled in her eyes.

"Whom do you mean?" he asked absent-mindedly.

"The editor of that paper—the man who accepted your work without a word of appreciation, and now stupidly steps between you and your first success."

"I really can't blame him," answered Wilmot, gloomily. "I was glad enough to have him publish my work. Perhaps he thought he was doing me a favor—he may really have pushed my story in ahead of some other hungry aspirant. The fault was mine; I ought to have written him that I intended to offer the manuscript elsewhere."

"I suppose you will let him know of its acceptance by the *Decade*, Wilmot."

"It would do no good; I was in his office once and he showed me a great pile of manuscripts which he considered good enough for his purpose. He said he was getting about twenty letters a day urging him to bring out accepted stories. I am sorry for him; he looked as if he were so hard-worked that he could not positively judge the merits of a manuscript. Good-bye. I shall come to see you soon—when I have had time to brace up."

CHAPTER III.

AS MURIEL was going slowly back up the long walk bordered by blooming rose bushes, she saw the tall figure of her mother appear on the veranda, holding a watering-pot in her hand and sprinkling some of the flowers which were grouped in rustic boxes on a stand.

Mrs. Fairchild put down the watering-pot as her daughter approached.

"Who was that, dear?" she asked. "I have left my glasses up stairs."

"Wilmot Burian, mother." The girl ascended the steps, put her roses on a window-sill and sank despondently into a big rocking chair. Mrs. Fairchild drew a deep breath. It had vast meaning, and the eyes of mother and daughter failed to meet. Mrs. Fairchild took another deep breath —it was almost a sigh—then she said impulsively:

"Daughter, I must talk to you—you simply must listen to me. I have your interest always at heart. I would not say anything but for your good. You must not get angry—you must listen."

"I am listening, mother." An expression of

deep pain had taken possession of the beautiful young face.

Mrs. Fairchild put down the watering-pot and placed a chair near Muriel. "I don't want you to imagine, dear, that I do not like Wilmot. I think few people who know him can fail to feel drawn to him, but, dear, it is a mother's duty not to allow her daughter to fall in love with a man whom it would not be expedient for her to marry. It is really the talk of the town about what a failure he has made of his profession, and—"

"I know that," broke in Muriel; "but he is not the first young man to take up a profession that is not congenial to his tastes or talent. He has strong hopes of becoming a writer."

"Well, to say the least of it, he is not acting honorably to pay attention to a marriageable girl, with so much uncertainty before him."

"You needn't be troubled on that score, mother," answered Muriel bitterly. "We have come to a clear understanding already. He would never think of marrying for a very long time to come. He said he was too poor a lawyer to support a wife, and he has not made a start in anything else."

"Muriel, you know as well as I do that he is in love with you."

A flush half of pleasure, half of annoyance rose in the girl's face.

"He has never mentioned such a thing to me in his life," she said in a low tone. She took up her roses and began to arrange them.

"That may be, Muriel, but he is in love with you, nevertheless. I can see it in his face. When he mentions your name, he even—but what is the use to argue with you about what you know is true?"

"Go on, mother; do tell me what you started to say." Muriel seemed to forget everything in her eagerness. She leaned towards her mother and stared into her face. You must tell me, mother; do you really think he cares for me? *Do* tell me. You were a girl once. You know how a girl feels. Do you think he cares for me? Sometimes I am afraid he is so wrapped up in his work that he does not think of me as—"

"As fiddlesticks! You know he is heels over head in love with you, and I am afraid that you have allowed yourself to become just as foolish about him. I don't see what has got into your father. Surely he ought to see that you are making a goose of yourself and ruining all your prospects."

"Mother," cried Muriel quickly, a sudden look

of alarm in her eyes, "don't mention this to papa. He is so hasty, so—it makes him so angry to think of my marrying anybody that—you know it might cause him to forbid Wilmot's coming here. Oh, mother! Remember how you felt once. Don't make me unhappy all the rest of my life. I know what there is in Wilmot, and—and I shall never care for anyone else as long as I live. Mother, do let us alone. If you don't you will make me very miserable."

Mrs. Fairchild shrugged her shoulders. Her daughter's words and tone drew a look of tender sympathy into her sweet old face.

"I shall be acting very foolishly, I know," she said, almost resignedly. "But I do believe you will be unhappy if I say anything more." She stepped behind her daughter's chair, drew the girl's head backward and kissed her on the mouth, then she turned into the great hall, and went up the stairs wiping her moist eyes.

As Wilmot entered the law office that morning, Mr. Bivings glanced up from the brief he was writing, and failing to catch the young man's eye he turned in his revolving chair and looked at Wilmot, who seated himself at his own desk, and began to take from his drawer some sheets of legal-cap paper.

"Well," said the lawyer, "you have actually roused my curiosity, so you have. Ever since you mentioned your good luck up-town I have been puzzling my brain to make out what has happened. I presume Hilkins has given you the case after all."

"It was nothing pertaining to the office," answered Wilmot, for the first time remembering his meeting with the lawyer that morning. "And after all, it turns out to be a mistake. I had sent a story to one of the most influential magazines in the country. The editor accepted it and sent a handsome check, but I find that the story has been printed elsewhere and I shall have to return the check and explain."

"Humph!" Mr. Bivings turned back to his work, a look of disappointment on his face. "That's all, eh?"

"That was all." Wilmot leaned his elbow on his desk. "I am sorry I spoke of it. I had no idea you would think it was something that would throw business in our way."

The older man turned again in his chair.

"Times are dull, my boy," he remarked coldly. "I thought if Hilkins had decided to give us the case that it would have been through his friendship for you, and it would have done a

good deal towards satisfying your father and stopping the gossips in town who are continually speaking of your being the proverbial lawyer without a case."

"Mr. Bivings," said Wilmot. "I want to say something to you. I want to be frank. I have made a mistake in going into the law. I did it because my father was so anxious that I should do it, but I see my blunder. However, I am not a dead man yet. I have had a great disappointment to-day, but even that is over now. I believe I can succeed in a profession I like better than the law, and I am going to do it. Nothing is worth having that does not come through toil of the severest kind, and I am going to work and win."

"You mean that you are going to quit me?" asked the old man in surprise.

"I think I ought to. I am doing no good as it is."

"But the clerical work you do for me is a great help," said the lawyer. "I really can't do without you just now."

"Oh, I'll stick to you as long as you wish," said Wilmot. "I shall not go till you have someone who can fill my place to your entire satisfaction."

"I hope you'll stick it out two months longer anyway," said Mr. Bivings. "A nephew of mine, young Martin, is coming then, and he can take your place."

"It would really suit me better to remain till then," replied Wilmot, and both men applied themselves to their respective work.

CHAPTER IV.

IT WAS a warm evening in July two months later. As Wilmot started down the avenue to the Fairchild's, all nature seemed rebelling against sleep. The katydids were shrilling loudly in the trees, frogs were croaking in the marshy places and many dogs in various directions were giving long-distant greetings to one another. Wilmot heard a negro picking a banjo in a cabin setting far back from the street in a grove of cone-shaped cedars. The air was laden with the perfume of flowers.

As he crossed the lawn at the Fairchild homestead he saw, through the open windows which extended to the level of the floor of the veranda, that the lamps in the old-time drawing-room were burning under their big colored silken shades. As he neared the house, he saw Muriel seated at the piano.

Often, under such circumstances, he entered at a window, not wishing to disturb her by ringing. But he paused on the veranda and feasted his eyes on her in the pink light of the piano-lamp. She was running her hands idly over the

keys, absently as if her thoughts were far away.

"I wonder," said the young man to himself, "how long it will be before I shall see her again. It would be an awful thing if we were never to meet after I leave."

It was as if she had divined his presence for she turned on the piano stool and looked towards the window. He laughed as he entered and stepped across the thick carpet.

"Why did you stop playing?" he asked.

"I think I knew you were there," she answered. "I am so glad you came to-night. Mother and father have gone to another church affair." She looked about the room. "It is warm here, will it not be pleasanter outside?"

"Decidedly," he answered. He held the heavy lace curtains aside for her to pass through the window, and then he followed her. After they were seated in a sort of bower of honeysuckle vines at one end of the veranda, he said:

"I want you to take a good look at me, weigh the tone of my voice, if you like, and tell me if you notice any marks of undue excitement about me."

She echoed his light laugh.

"You are in a joking mood," she said. "You have been amused over something. What is it?"

"I have been intensely excited all the after-

noon," he said. "But I have been doing everything in my power to calm myself before meeting you. The last time I was greatly excited you threw cold water on my enthusiasm by showing me that there was not the slightest excuse for it, and now before telling you my news I want to be prepared for your cold douche. Have you got it ready?"

"Really, what do you mean?"

"You remember, Muriel, when I came to you in the Spring and told you the *Decade* had accepted that story, that you showed me a copy of the *Echo* containing my death sentence?"

"Yes, but—oh, the editor of the *Decade* has taken another!"

"No; guess again."

"I can't guess when my curiosity is burning me up. What have you to tell me?"

He held out his wrist and laughed again. "Feel of my pulse. I want to be satisfied that my temperature is normal and that my heart beats as it should."

"Wilmot, don't be silly!"

"It is about the novel," he said. "Wellington and Clegg, of New York, have read it. They like it. They are going to commit financial suicide and bring it out."

"For a moment she said nothing. Then she put out her white hand and he clasped it between both his own.

"Oh, I am *so* glad!" she cried. "I knew it would come. I had unbounded faith in the book. It will make you famous—remember what I have said. It will make you famous!"

"I owe it all—whatever it amounts to—to you, Muriel," he said in a voice that quivered so much that it was unlike his own. "You have compelled me to believe in myself. Everybody in this town has laughed at my literary pretentions but you. The book may fall flat. The critics may tear it to pieces, but the writing of it has helped to make me stronger, and if I remain a poor man all my life, the time I spent on the book will not have been thrown away."

He raised her hand towards his lips and bowed his head as if to kiss it, but she gently drew it from him.

"You must not do that—happy as we are," she protested softly.

"Forgive me, Muriel," he said. "I forgot myself. I feel so grateful."

It looked as if she partially regretted her action, for she leaned her head on her hand and looked at him all but tenderly.

"You know you said that we must not think —that we must not hope to be more than friends, and what you were about to do would not have been right—as we are situated."

"You are right," he answered. "I must confess that it drives me wild to think of your ever being another man's wife, but your mother and father are acting wisely from their point of view. I am not worthy of you, and since they understand that we are to be only friends we must respect their confidence in us. But it is awfully hard. They will have little to worry them in the future. This will be my last visit for a long time."

The girl drew her hand from her face, and stared at him questioningly.

"You are going away?"

"In the morning."

"In the morning? Oh, surely you do not mean that!"

"Wellington and Clegg wrote me that they would like to have a talk with me about putting the book on the market, particularly in the South, and I thought I might as well make the plunge and be done with it. I can leave the office now. Young Martin is doing splendidly."

"I know it is best," said Muriel, "and the sooner you get up there with other men in your

line of work the better it will be for you, and yet I can hardly bear to see you go."

"I shall write to you often," replied Wilmot, "and you must persuade your father to allow you to come on and study this fall."

"I don't think he wants me to go this year," said the girl with a sigh. "It seems that I am becoming more necessary to him and mamma every day."

An hour later Mr. and Mrs. Fairchild returned home. They entered at a side gate and passed into the house in the rear. Wilmot rose to go.

"I am going to walk with you to the gate," said Muriel, sadly.

"Don't you think your parents might disapprove?" asked Wilmot.

"I don't care what they think," answered the girl desperately. "This is the last time, and I want my way. Mamma won't care when she knows it was to say good-bye."

She put her hand on his arm and kept it there till they had reached the gate. The moon had risen above the near-by hills, causing the stars to fade from view. Wilmot opened the gate, her hand falling from his arm as he did so; he passed out and closed the gate between them.

"Fate," he said grimly, indicating the gate.

"Oh, I wish you had not said that—exactly that!" Muriel cried. "I don't want to think it will be like that.

Her hand was resting on the top of the gate. The diamonds in her rings flashed coldly in the moonlight; her hand looked like marble. He took it, and pressed it tightly in one of his. Her face, her parted lips, her swimming eyes were close to his.

"Good-bye," he said.

She made no reply, her voice hanging in her throat, and he moved away. Turning, when he had only taken a few steps, he saw her still standing where he had left her. He went back, took her face between his hands and kissed her passionately—recklessly.

"I could not help it, Muriel," he said. "I really could not. Good-bye."

She did not utter a word, but he heard her sob as she turned away.

CHAPTER V.

"IF I HAD known you really intended to come I believe I should have advised you to think it over," said Louis Chester to Wilmot on the arrival of the latter in New York two days later. "It's a dog's life, Burian, and not a lap-dog's either—the brute belongs to the yaller pup species. You won't find yourself unknown by a long shot. Did you read last month's *Current Fiction?*"

"I have never seen it," answered Wilmot.

"Good gracious, where do you live? It's a new eclectic magazine that is quite popular with literary folk. The number I speak of reprinted your story, 'The Repentance of Milburn,' from the *Echo.* In an editorial the editor declared it a gem, a—a—he said lots of nice things about it. I have heard it mentioned in several places. Weyland read it to a crowd of us the other night in the studio, and it was enthusiastically applauded.

"I have told that experience of yours with the editor of the *Decade* a dozen times. Harrison says it was simply tragic; but you never wrote me what he replied when you returned his check."

"He simply thanked me," answered Wilmot, "and said he regretted that the mistake had occurred."

"Not a word of encouragement to submit something else?" asked Chester. "Then it was not the *Decade* that broke the back of your rusticity?"

"No. It was my novel," smiled Wilmot. "I have found a publisher for it."

"Ah, I might have guessed it! Few men are willing to remain in retirement during the calm that precedes the storm of a first appearance in covers. I have my first scrapbook. I pasted into it every newspaper mention of myself. If I went to a tea and was mentioned along with a job lot of light-weight celebrities I always blue penciled my name and preserved the entire account. I liked to see myself in droves of people who wanted to shine, and gathered like moths round someone who could gleam, even a little. I had an idea that my scrap books would some day be sold at auction; I foolishly fancied I could see at the sale a thousand scrambling, bruised-nosed bidders. I had the proofs of my first novel bound in Russian leather and wrote in the first copies, 'first from the press, second from the press, third,' etc., and so on up to a hundred.

Only the man receiving the high honor of the first copy acknowledged receipt of it. He said he would read it when he had time. There has been a humiliating slump in my market. I got only one request last month for my autograph, and I began to hedge by saving the stamp. It was from a young lady in Maine. She said she had a horrible spinal affliction that kept her in bed twenty-four hours a day. She said my stories were the only comfort she got out of life. I was touched I assure you, and thinking it would do me good to look over former requests for my autograph, I got out the package in which I had tied them. You can imagine my chagrin when I found that ten out of the twenty requests I had received in the past were from girls with spinal affliction; they all lived in the same town in Maine and had the same handwriting. Every time I had published a new story my ardent admirer had spotted me as a beginner, and asked for my autograph. Her idea is, I believe, to paper a room—a town hall, I think—with the signatures of authors. I shall not send mine to her again. I dread the humiliation of the paperhanger's discovering my multiplicity.

"That very night there was a lot of fellows in this room, and James Fitch Ellerton began to

talk of his work, and incidentally mentioned that he had just got something which had done him more good than all the editorial recognition he had ever received. It had drawn tears to his eyes, he said, and strengthened his determination to prove worthy of the confidence that people he had never met personally seemed to place in him.

"'Gentlemen,' he said, 'I hold in my hand a letter from a poor girl who is confined to her bed with an awful spinal complaint.'

"He paused to take the letter from the envelope, and I broke in:

"'I'll bet a box of cigars that she lives at W—, Maine, and that your stories are the only comfort she gets out of life.'

"Ellerton stared for a minute, then he said:

"'Chester, you have read this letter.'

"'Not that but ten like it,' I said throwing my collection on the table, and the gang laughed at him. But seriously, tell me about the novel, Burian; who is to bring it out?"

"Wellington and Clegg."

"Good people," answered Chester—"that is, fairly good; I think perhaps they are publishing too many books, but that is not your lookout. What terms?"

"Ten per cent. royalty plan," returned Wil-

mot. "They wanted me to give them the royalty on the first two thousand, but I refused."

"Good!" exclaimed Chester. "That's true grit. I had even to accept the last refuge of helpless authors and spend quite a sum of money before my first publishers would market my wares. Wellington and Clegg must have liked your story."

"They said nothing of its merit till the papers were signed, then they praised it and wanted me to agree to write another for them."

"And—?"

"I told them that I would wait till the book was out and think the matter over."

"I admire your pluck for a beginner," declared Chester. "I was simply crazy to see myself in print. I would have bartered ten years of my life for a thousand copies of my callow enthusiasm well distributed. When will the book appear?"

"In about four weeks from now."

"Rather early, but you must work it up in the meantime. I'll introduce you to some of the critics and if they take a liking to you they will give you a boom; being a new man is decidedly in your favor."

"I should be glad to meet any friends of yours," said Wilmot, rising, "but I want my work to be judged solely on its merits."

"Oh, of course I understand that," said Chester quickly and he followed his friend across the corridor into another room. "I hope you will like this apartment. I told Mrs. McGowan, the landlady, that you were a friend of mine, and she will look after your comfort. There are some agreeable people in the building—Frank Harrison, first door next to mine, and Weyland has his studio at the top."

"It will be an inspiration to know that you are at work under the same roof," replied Wilmot.

"Oh, I haven't done a literary thing in six months; I am only making cord-wood now."

"Cord-wood!" echoed Wilmot, "I am not sure that I understand the word."

"It is matter that is bought by measurement," smiled Chester. "We get so much a foot. We take a look at the editorial wood-shed and bid on filling it. It is not so much a matter of brains and genius as muscle. Most of us use typewriters. The big contractors dictate to shorthand scribblers who sublet the work to people who do copying at bread and water prices. That is one reason I was afraid you might not get on at first, for judging you by your carefully-written sketches you must be a most conscientious writer. Whether you will ever get over it I don't know,

but this is not the age for conscientious work. I saw a list of six English writers yesterday all of whom say they write from four to eight thousand words a day."

"I don't think that sort of thing can ever be right," said Wilmot. "I don't want anything of mine to be published till I have done my best on it."

"I sized you up that way," said Chester. "It seems to me that the place for you is the country where board is cheap. You ought to take a week for polishing a paragraph, and grow a beard while writing another. If you stay here you will get gloriously over all that. New York will knock holes in your literary conscience. When I first came here I entertained your views, but now it is a neck and neck race for shekels. I am getting to be like Ellerton. He says he is in it for the cash."

Wilmot laughed good-naturedly.

"Notwithstanding this, I am going to stick to art for art's sake," he said. "I shall do my work right if I starve at it."

"If it is starvation you are hungering for," said Chester, "you can certainly get all you want, but you haven't been tested. Wait till you are disgusted with your efforts that won't bring

enough cash to keep you in clean collars; wait till an empty stomach drives out the tenants of your brain; wait till you begin to smart under your inability to keep pace financially with men not half your equal; wait, I say, Burian, till—till you are forty years of age and love a woman and would rather die a thousand times than give her up and yet know that she would expect you to hold your own with the rest—that her people would expect you to do it, and that her love would die if you failed. Ah, my boy, you don't know what you are talking about!"

Chester's tone had changed so remarkably that Wilmot stared at him in wonder. Both of them were silent for a moment, then Wilmot said:

"What is the matter with you, old man?"

"Why do you ask that?" inquired Chester.

"You don't seem quite like your old self. You look nervous, and not so well as when we last met."

"Oh, I'm all right," returned Chester. He sat down on Wilmot's sofa and folded his hands over his knee. "But I am really concerned about you and your future. By the way, tell me what has become of that Miss Fairchild?"

"She is still at Dadeville. She was very well when I left."

Chester's eyes met Wilmot's steadily.

"She is a wonderfully fine girl," he said. "I saw a good deal of her here last winter. She has a tip-top voice. She is a staunch friend of yours, and has unbounded faith in your future."

"I am glad you like her so much," said Wilmot simply; "she is really the best friend I have."

"I say, Burian," began Chester awkwardly, and he laid his hand on Wilmot's knee familiarly; "pardon what I am going to say, but remember I am ten years older than you, and I feel a great interest in you. Don't make the mistake I made when I was about your age."

"What was that?" asked Wilmot in surprise.

"I allowed the literary current I was in at that time" answered Chester "to sweep me away from the shores of matrimony into a sea of damnable discontent. I ought to have married then. In following my will o' the wisp I have actually become an unnatural man. Max Nordau is correct in saying that the majority of literary men are crazy. They remove themselves from nature and natural impulses. Note how many literary men there are who fail to get married. No man is better adapted to home life than an author, and yet no man can so easily miss securing that sort of happiness. Don't follow in my footsteps, Burian. I'd rather never

have written a line than to suffer as I do from the lonely, eccentric life I am leading. If the dream of the other life would leave me it might not be so bad, but it's in my sky always—always."

With that Chester suddenly stood up. "Well," he said with a short laugh, "I am going back to my desk to write a column of jests and jingles for the Sunday *Advance*."

CHAPTER VI.

THE next morning Wilmot went into the landlady's sitting-room on the ground floor to leave an order for his mail, and as he was leaving he asked her if Chester had come down to breakfast.

"I don't think he came in at all last night," she said, shrugging her fat shoulders over her ironing board, "poor young man! I guess they put 'im on some night work at the *Advance;* they often do and he gets in about twelve o'clock more dead than alive."

Just then there was a light rap on the half-open door, and a young lady about twenty years of age looked in. She was a perfect blonde, above medium height, slender, well-formed and stylishly dressed. Her features were regular, and her brow had the breadth of rare intelligence. She was decidedly pretty, her every movement a wave of grace.

"Oh, I beg pardon!" she exclaimed, on seeing Wilmot, who rose as she stepped to Mrs. McGowan's table and laid on it a sealed envelope.

"Please give it to Mr. Chester," she said—

just a bare suggestion of a flush in her cheeks; "do you know if he has come down yet?"

"I don't think he came in last night, Miss Aline. This gentleman, his friend, was just asking about him."

The girl turned towards Wilmot; the color in her face deepening as she spoke.

"We are both friends of his," she said. "I think you must be Mr. Wilmot Burian; I have heard Mr. Chester speak of you often."

"I have known him several years," answered Wilmot, bowing.

She held out her hand.

"This is a genuine Bohemian introduction," she laughed. "I am Miss Weyland. He has promised to bring you up to papa's studio soon" —motioning upward with her gloved hand— "Mr. Chester thinks a great deal of you."

"The friendship is common to us both, I assure you," was Wilmot's reply. "Chester has often written me about Mr. Weyland's work and their intimacy, but I did not know that Mr. Weyland had a daughter."

A shadow fell across the girl's face, and Wilmot saw that he had made a false step. She evidently did not appreciate Chester's not having mentioned her.

"You have not seen him this morning?" she asked, moving towards the entrance.

"I have not; I rapped on his door as I passed, but got no response."

Her hand was on the door handle. "Don't let it be long before you come to see us," were her parting words as she passed out into the corridor. "Papa will be delighted to see you."

Mrs. McGowan went to the door and looked after the girl, then she returned to her ironing-table and put the note for Chester in front of the clock on the mantlepiece.

"So you didn't know Mr. Weyland had a daughter?" said she, with a knowing smile. "Well, it does look like he'd a-mentioned her to you. Him an Mr. Chester is like two brothers. Mr. Weyland is a widower—not much older than Mr. Chester either, an' when she come home from boardin' school six months ago her father took rooms for her next to his studio, an' since then the three of 'em have lived like one family. Mr. Chester is as free in the studio as if he paid the rent, an' often when Mr. Weyland is out of town, or busy on special orders, Mr. Chester takes charge and receives the folks that always come on reception day an' sees to who is to play, or sing, or dance, or act, or what not. Him an' Miss Aline certainly are great friends."

Wilmot did not wish to encourage the woman's tendency to gossip, so he turned away, but a light had broken upon him. He was beginning to understand what had prompted Chester's feeling remarks about matrimony.

Mrs. McGowan put down her smoothing iron and followed him to the door.

"I reckon," she said to herself as much as to Wilmot, "that he didn't mention her because he thinks maybe she likes Mr. Harrison."

To this Wilmot made no response, and she reluctantly closed the door after him.

CHAPTER VII.

DESPITE her hopes for his ultimate success, Muriel was very unhappy after Wilmot's departure. His visits had become essential to her enjoyment.

The first day after he had gone was the longest she had ever known. She avoided the observing eye of her mother as much as possible. Most of that day was spent in her room because there, in a private drawer, reserved alone for things pertaining to him, were his letters, copies of his printed stories, notes she had jotted down in regard to plots after her talks with him.

As she sat before this little drawer and looked back on the past, a lump rose in her throat. It gave her a touch of sadness to think that he would now be without what he had often said was so helpful to him—her suggestions and constant encouragement. She had several good cries, always drying her eyes most carefully afterward for fear her mother might burst in upon her suddenly and detect these indications of her trouble.

But Mrs. Fairchild was considerate of her daughter's feelings. Indeed, if Muriel only

might have looked in on her mother in the solitude of her sitting-room she would have seen that Mrs. Fairchild was suffering with her. The gentle woman took up first one piece of needle-work and then another, only to abandon each with weary sighs. She wandered out to her garden in the rear of the house, gave the gardener unnecessary advice, then went in to the kitchen and talked to the cook about the dinner, all the time thinking of her child's grief.

Later that sultry, cloudy afternoon, she was out at a summer-house training vines to climb up the lattice-work, when she saw Muriel, dressed for a walk, come down stairs into the hall.

Mrs. Fairchild laid down her shears and stepped from the chair on which she was standing. Then she went across the grass to her daughter, smiling sweetly.

"Are you going for a walk, darling?" she asked.

"Yes, mother," the girl was drawing on her gloves as she descended the veranda steps.

Mrs. Fairchild sighed.

"Daughter, you are going to see Mrs. Burian."

Muriel did not look at the speaker as she answered.

"Yes, mother."

"Daughter, I don't—I hardly think I would, so soon anyway. You know how apt people are to talk."

"I am going, mother dear," replied Muriel firmly. "I think I ought to."

"But you have never called on her, or Laura, and you know—"

"All the more reason why I should go now," interrupted Muriel. "Mother, if I had gone away yesterday, and you were alone at home you would be glad to have a friend of mine drop in. Isn't that true?"

Mrs. Fairchild acknowledged her complete defeat in her next remark.

"Well, don't stay late, dear. You must not think me unsympathetic. Your trouble is mine. Go do as you like; but, darling, it is awful hard to know that I haven't all your heart. Now, I presume you will love his mother. I wouldn't blame you, she is a dear soul, but—"

"Silly mamma," Muriel laughed. She kissed her mother and turned away.

As she approached the home of the Burians, Muriel saw Mrs. Burian rocking back and forth on the front veranda. She was glad of this, for in bowing to the old lady from the gate she took

from her visit the appearance of formality. She tried to make it seem as if she were out walking for pleasure, and stopped only because she noticed Mrs. Burian on the veranda.

"I thought I might be able to cheer you up a little, Mrs. Burian," she said, as the old lady rose and held out her hand. "Of course, I know of Wilmot's leaving, and I can imagine this first day must be a melancholy one."

"The bluest I ever spent I do believe," smiled Mrs. Burian. "And I am so glad you came. It is very good of you." She went into the hall and brought another chair. "Sit down. Won't you take off your hat?"

Muriel had not time to stop long.

"He and I have been such companions, and such good friends, that I miss him, too, very much," she remarked.

The old lady rocked back and forth, her thin hands crossed in her lap.

"If I only knew that it would come out all right," she said plaintively, "it would be altogether different. But I can't imagine how he is going to get along away up there in a strange city without any business or sufficient money. It seems such a great risk for an inexperienced young man to take.

Muriel felt glad she had come, as she answered reassuringly :

"You must not feel that way, Mrs. Burian. He is going to do wonderful things in New York."

Mrs. Burian brought her chair to a stand. Her thin hand quivered as she raised it to her mouth.

"Do you believe that, Muriel?" she questioned. "Do you in fact?"

"As confidently as I believe anything," said the girl. "He has wonderful talent—it really amounts to genius. It will be impossible for the public to fail to appreciate his work when it is put before them in his novel."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you talk that way," cried Mrs. Burian. "He is such a good boy, and does love his writing so much. I am absolutely ignorant of such matters, and I have heard so many folks talk against a young man doing story-writing. You know most everybody here thinks he is throwing away his time. Miss Sarah Benson called this morning to talk over the literary club-meeting with Laura. Laura has just joined. I asked Miss Sarah if she had read any of Wilmot's stories, and I thought she was almost impolite. She said her time was taken up so

much with managing the classical books the club had picked out that she hadn't a minute to give to little short stories in trashy papers. She said she didn't believe in wasting time on the writing of people who were unknown."

"But the world at large, fortunately, is not like Miss Sarah," said Muriel, consolingly. "She sneers at everything that does not bear a big name, and thinks she knows everything about literature that is worth knowing. But," Muriel's indignation was waxing higher, "the world at large reads the stories by new writers, and if they are good, they have the courage of their convictions and declare them so. They are the people to whom posterity really owes its literature. Miss Sarah's club rarely opens its door to real home talent. If the home talent will only read its productions before the august body of the club the members will laud it to the skies, but the home talent that secures an audience actually one million times larger is promptly sat upon. If Miss Sarah's club could possibly teach me anything about books I would join it, but when any well-educated girl has to listen to little Maudie Simmons simper over a paper on such topics as 'The Limitations of the Historical Novel' it is not enthralling, to say the least."

Mrs. Burian laughed heartily.

"I declare I think you are right, Muriel. Laura says the girls don't compose what they read, anyway. They say our minister's sermons are being neglected because he writes nearly all the compositions for the girls in town. I know that Laura never can talk about one of her subjects a week after she has studied it."

"I don't mean to be severe," went on Muriel, elated over having amused the old lady, "and I would not criticise their methods if they would only see the merit in Wilmot's stories."

A shadow fell across Mrs. Burian's sweet old features.

"They predict that he will go to ruin now that he has given up the law," she sighed. "Several of the neighbors have been in to talk about it. They all seem to think I am actually to be pitied."

Muriel's eyes flashed.

"They shall see," she said. "It won't be long either before his book is out, and then they will hear from him."

"I do hope it will be so," said Mrs. Burian. "When people thought he was doing nothing because he had no cases in court, he was sitting in his room up stairs every night reading and writ-

ing till almost morning. I could tell when he went to bed for the light of his lamp always shone on that oak tree out there. Sometimes I'd wake up at one or two o'clock and the light would be as bright as ever."

Muriel glanced at the staircase in the hall.

"I never knew which was his room," she said, tentatively. "I have often wondered in passing."

"It is up under the roof," remarked the old woman. "It is such a queer place. He left it just as it was. I'm a good mind to show it to you—that is, if you'd care to see it."

"I should like it very much," the girl returned after a moment's hesitation in which her mother's warning face flashed before her mental vision.

"Come on then," Mrs. Burian laughed. "I don't know what he would say. I am sure he would not object to your seeing it."

They ascended the old-fashioned narrow stairs and went into the little room under the sloping roof. It was indeed a queer-looking place. The rafters were once bare, but Wilmot had covered them and the walls with dark blue cloth. The cloth bulged out between the brass-headed tacks and made it look like a padded cell curiously decorated. On the wall of one entire side, the cloth was hidden by a collection of posters of

magazines and books. Some of these were framed in natural wood, others were under glass narrowly edged with paper. A German student lamp stood in the centre of a little square table on which lay some sheets of ink-saturated blotting paper. A pen lay beside an uncorked ink bottle.

"Is this the pen he used?" asked Muriel.

"Yes," was Mrs. Burian's reply. "I suppose he thought it was not worth taking. It is such a cheap one, and is about worn out."

The eyes of the two women met. There was something in Muriel's that Mrs. Burian could not quite understand. Perhaps it was because her own love affair lay so deeply enveloped in the shadows and worries of the past. Finally a thought came to her; she received it telephatically through the mediumship of Muriel's eyes.

"Perhaps you would like to have the pen, since —since you are such a good friend of his and count so much on his success," stammered the old woman.

"I was almost tempted to ask for it," confessed the girl, and she flushed as she had never flushed before her own mother.

"Oh, you are welcome to it," said Mrs. Burian. "We have no need of it. Mr. Burian brings them home by the dozen."

"Thank you so much." Muriel put the pen into her pocket and looked about the room. Mrs. Burian moved to the fireplace over which were fastened pictures of great authors, actors and musicians. The mantlepiece was filled with photographs of Wilmot's friends, but there was a noticeable vacancy in the centre as if something had been taken away. Mrs. Burian's eyes rested on the spot.

"I said nothing had been changed," she said, "but I see he has taken your picture. It always stood right here, back of this little china plate. He always kept water in the plate, and when he came in through the garden he often gathered flowers and placed them there."

Muriel felt a tightness in her throat; her eyes grew moist, there was a mist before her sight. She took a chair and Mrs. Burian sat down on Wilmot's bed, now spotlessly white under its fresh coverlet.

"He was always good even as a child," sighed the old lady. "He was unlike his brother that died. Wilmot was so tender with me. He really was the only one that kept up the habit of kissing me every morning when he went out and every evening when he came in. That naturally made him my favorite. Until he began to displease his

father by writing so much I never had one unhappy moment about him—not one."

"Mr. Burian will some day understand him and be the—the proudest father in Dadeville." Muriel found the courage to say, leaning her head on her hand and resting her elbow on the table.

"You have made me feel almost happy," said Mrs. Burian. "I am so glad you came to see me. It was so thoughtful. I was so lonely. No one else has thought of anything more cheerful to say than to predict his failure. I hope you will come in whenever you can. It seems strange to me that I should like you so much all at once. But I suppose it is because we both miss Wilmot."

"That must be it," answered Muriel, who was struggling against the impulse to kiss the old face. She rose and moved towards the door. The sky outside had darkened and the small, single window let in a little of the lingering daylight. She wanted to get away before Laura Burian came home.

That night in her room as Muriel prepared for sleep, she took out the old pen, held it reverently in her palms and kissed it. She then laid it away in the drawer containing Wilmot's letters and fell on her knees and prayed for him.

CHAPTER VIII.

THAT very afternoon Chester came into Wilmot's room while the latter was working on a short story which he had begun in the South.

"Sorry I didn't see you this morning," he began. "I had some work in Newspaper Row, and could not get back in time to ask you to lunch with me at the Author's Club. We will go some other day. But I have made an engagement for us this afternoon to attend a reception at the Galatin, given by Dorothea Helpin Langdon. You know who she is; she edits the *Young People's Pastime*, and is 'Kitty Caruthers' on the *Advance*."

Wilmot hesitated, glancing down at his manuscript from which he had risen.

"Don't you think it rather early for me to—"

"Not a bit of it; the sooner the better," interrupted Chester. "Your book will soon be out, and the newspaper people you will meet there will help to set your literary ball rolling. Besides Dorothea may ask you to contribute something to the *Pastime*."

"But—" Wilmot looked down at his clothes.

"Oh, rubbish! You'll be the best dressed

man there ; your frock coat fits you as if you had been melted into it. You are going to be called the handsomest man in New York this season."

Wilmot frowned.

"I am at your disposal," he said.

"You'll meet a lot of log-rollers," laughed Chester, sitting down. "Dorothea made me tell her all I knew about you and your work. I assure you I boomed you to the limit of my imagination. She will, in her turn, impress your greatness on her guests, and you must not deny anything. Denying one's magnitude is inartistic and is something deity has never been guilty of. Poise yourself so that the really intelligent will think you take the booming as a joke, and the others as undefiled truth that falls short of the mark. The better element will be hidden behind curtains and sip their tea in retired corners, so, in the main you'd better play the dignity act."

Wilmot noticed the dark rings round Chester's eyes, the sallow paleness of his face, the nervous movements of his hands, and recalled Mrs. McGowan's gossip.

"Chester," he said suddenly, "you did not tell me Weyland had a daughter."

Chester started ; he raised a studious glance to Wilmot's face.

"Didn't I?" he asked slowly; "surely you have forgotten, but how did you know he—that there *was* a young lady?"

"We happened to meet in the landlady's room this morning. She ran in to see about something—I think it was to leave a note for you."

"For me?" exclaimed Chester, in a startled voice, "are you sure?"

"Quite sure; she left it with Mrs. McGowan."

Chester tried to appear indifferent as he rose. "I—I'll run down and see about it," he said. "Mrs. McGowan was not in when I came up. Perhaps it is something Miss Weyland wants me to attend to. Be ready at four, old man, I don't want to disappoint Mrs. Langdon."

. . . . . .

The Galatin was a large modern hotel in West Twenty-fifth street near Fifth Avenue. Mrs. Langdon's apartment was on the seventh floor, to which visitors were projected by a swift elevator in charge of a colored boy in blue uniform.

"Looks like an awful crush," remarked Chester as the elevator stopped and a buzz of many voices reached their ears from the end of a corridor branching off towards the right. Chester

piloted Wilmot along a narrow passage to a dressing-room behind the salon. Here hats, canes, umbrellas and wraps were piled like jack-straws on the bed.

"Dorothea's boudoir," explained Chester, when the white-aproned maid had departed with their cards. He picked up a silver-backed hair-brush and struck at his thick hair. "I say, Burian"—leaning close to the mirror of the dressing-table, "am I not looking awfully thin and yellow?"

"A little, perhaps," admitted Wilmot, "but—"

"It's my liver, old man," ran on Chester, who had not noticed the hesitation in Wilmot's reply. "It's all out of order. I know I am not in good form. The truth is, I am overworked."

Wilmot could formulate no suitable reply; he was saved from the necessity of it by the reappearance of the maid to conduct them to the drawing-room.

As they entered the large salon, from which every suggestion of daylight had been carefully excluded to heighten the effect of the electric lights beneath daintily tinted globes and gauzy silken shades. Wilmot was struck with the beauty of the scene, and felt his pulses quicken with a sensation he had never experienced. As they

entered Mrs. Langdon approached from a group of ladies and gentlemen in the centre of the room.

"Oh, Mr. Chester!" she exclaimed, "I was just wondering if you had proved false. Writers never keep appointments except with the cashier on pay day. No, no; no conventionality, please," she laughed, raising a jeweled hand to oppose Chester's introduction of Wilmot. "I already know Mr. Burian by reputation. I have read your sketch that everybody is talking about, 'The Repentance of—' what's his name? and know you will be heard from again. We are going to look to you for the great American novel, *n'est ce pas*, Monsieur Chester?"

Wilmot bowed over her hand. He was vaguely disappointed. He had never read a line that she had written, but he had heard of her as being the editor of a child's magazine and as a writer of helpful articles about women and their progress, and had expected her to have less the manner and appearance of a thorough society woman.

Her cheeks were thin, her face was slightly rouged and powdered.

Wilmot did not remember what he said, but whatever it was, did not come from his heart. Already he had caught the plague of insincerity. Fortunately relief came; the maid was showing in

new visitors. As Mrs. Langdon began to smile and bow to them he caught sight of his reflection in a pier-glass across the room, and felt ashamed to see it there. He hoped Chester would not introduce him to any of the people to whom he was bowing and ejaculating words of greeting. He felt a vague yearning for a seat in one of the book-lined alcoves, or that failing, to be allowed to stand undisturbed like the statues in the corners. It seemed silly of Chester to be shaking hands on a level with people's eyes.

"There is Mrs. Sennett!" Chester exclaimed. "She was with Mrs. Langdon this morning, and said she wanted to meet you. She has you on the prongs of her gaze now. We must go over to her. She is a rich widow; her specialty is young men of talent; they say she educated Tarpley, the Chicago painter. Come on."

Mrs. Sennett appeared to be about fifty years of age. Some of her friends declared she was five years older. She did not use rouge, but it was said that she began so early in life to patronize a certain practitioner in the art of smoothing away wrinkles that her face was much younger-looking than her Maker had intended it to remain. A disciple of Delsarte, her movements had the grace of mature youth as she drew her skirts aside for Wilmot to sit beside her.

"I've been anxious to meet you," she said, beaming on him. "I have heard of you and your work; I never could account for my extraordinary interest in authors."

"I have really not made a beginning," said Wilmot, reddening with vexation as he thought of the false position Chester had put him in.

"O, how absurd!" exclaimed the widow, touching his arm playfully with her tinseled fan, "and yet the critics are ready to review your writings; your book will soon be on everybody's table, and —oh lots of other things! Tell me really how it feels."

Her eyes wandered from his face to the doorway through which a tall beardless man with long black hair was entering.

"That's Charles Kersey," she said without waiting for him to reply; "he belongs to the Wrenshall Stock Company, and does the leading rôles in all their new plays. He is a great celebrity. Watch Dorothea smirk and bend before him. She has never before been able to entice him here. I venture she will give him a column in the *Advance* tomorrow. She stopped mentioning the Wrenshall plays all at once and filled up her theatrical space with other matter; that showed Kersey her value; then she sent him her card for this 'at home' and

he came. Dorothea is very sly—almost too sly to be a good friend."

Mrs. Sennett paused for a moment, and eyed Wilmot critically from head to foot, then she said :

"You are going to make it without doubt. I predict it!"

"Make what?" asked he, wonderingly.

"A social success this season," was her response. "I have never seen anyone with more of the necessary qualifications. Right now, I am the envy of all those young ladies over there in that group because I happen to know you. Not even Kersey himself is attracting so much attention; you see it is known that he is engaged. Ah, there is Weyland and his pretty daughter. I wonder why he has brought her here. I have heard that he would not let her know Dorothea. I'd risk anything that Dorothea has thrown out a hint that she is going to have her portrait painted to be exhibited in Paris or London. Even men as clever as Weyland lay aside prejudice to ob-obtain patronage and advertisement. Do you think Miss Weyland pretty, Mr. Burian?"

"Quite," answered Wilmot, "and she looks good and sincere."

"Decidedly out of place in this crowd, it

seems to me," remarked Mrs. Sennett with a touch of honesty in her tone that Wilmot liked more than her previous gossip. "I have heard that your friend Mr. Chester admires her very much."

"They are warm friends I believe," Wilmot returned; "he and Weyland are very intimate."

"You are a mystery to me! You don't seem a bit vain," laughed Mrs. Sennett; "the young ladies in the room are anxious to get at you, and yet you have flattered me with fully ten minutes of your undivided attention. There is a bold thing elbowing her way towards us now; it would be just like her to dare to—"

A young woman in a simple tailor-made gown had stopped beside the widow, and bent to her right ear.

"Present me, please, Mrs. Sennett," she whispered loud enough for Wilmot to overhear; "I must get back to the office by seven, and I have another tea to take in."

"I don't see how I can, Miss Hatch," coldly replied Mrs. Sennett, "you see—why, ask Dorothea—she—"

"Her hands are too full," hastily broke in the young woman. "Besides, she'd be afraid I'd get a news item. Well, I presume I shall have

to do it myself." The speaker crossed over to Wilmot.

"I beg pardon," she said to him, "this is Mr. Burian, I think?"

"It is," said Wilmot, rising and bowing.

"I am Miss Hatch of the *Afternoon Progress*, the reporter continued glibly. "I hope you won't think me bold, but I am a newspaper woman and have to beard you lions in your dens sometimes. I was sent up here by my paper to get items. So, please, talk fast, there is another skirted scribe over there trying to devise some less heroic method than mine to get at you. I overheard Mrs. Langdon just now speaking about your new book and your work in the South, and I thought you might not object to talk a little for publication."

"There is really nothing to be said," replied Wilmot who had never been interviewed by a reporter. "I am only a beginner, and—"

"But you have had a novel accepted that is soon to appear?"

"Yes, but—"

"How very lucky you are! Are your publishers in New York?"

She had taken a tiny notebook and a pencil from her pocket.

"I don't think I would care to say anything for publica—"

"Is the title a secret?" asked the young woman, stabbing her lips with the tip of the pencil, and clutching her note-book with a fresh grasp as she began to write. "And would you mind giving me a hint as to the general character or purpose of the book; but first of all who are your publishers?"

"Wellington and Clegg," answered Wilmot, "but frankly, Miss Hatch, I do not desire to have my book mentioned at present. My publishers will in due time, I believe, send out an announcement to the press, and I should not like to be quoted as saying anything beforehand."

"Wellington and Clegg!" exclaimed the reporter, looking up in astonishment. "How very unfortunate! Why, have you not heard the news?"

"I don't understand," replied Wilmot.

"I see you don't know," went on the young woman. "Of course you don't! I should not have known it myself if my editor hadn't telephoned me only half an hour ago to run in there and get all the information possible. Why, they have gone all to pieces—Wellington and Clegg have. The sheriff took charge of their place early this afternoon. It is said their

liabilities will reach half a million. I am awfully sorry for you, Mr. Burian. Edgar Prenness, a friend of mine was there, and the poor fellow was almost crying with disappointment. His novel was not sold to them outright, but he said all accepted manuscripts would be held till a settlement is made, and that might take considerable time."

Wilmot felt his blood turn cold. He had a dim impression that Miss Hatch was studying his features with the cold eye of a vivisectionist, and that Mrs. Sennett was giving his coat-tail a gentle, surreptitious tug. He saw Chester bending over Miss Weyland at the piano, a tender expression in his eyes, and Mrs. Langdon in close conversation with the girl's father before a late portrait of Dorothea on the wall. Wilmot tried to say something to the young woman at his side, but his words fluttered unborn in his throat.

"It must be a great blow to you," said Miss Hatch, drawing a cross mark over the words she had just written. "It was Mr. Prenness' first book. It had been refused by fifteen publishers. He says even if he had it back, it would only remain on his hands."

"Don't let a little thing like that bother you." It was Mrs. Sennett's consoling voice, and the

widow stood up and glared at Miss Hatch. "Sit down and try to think of something else."

"You are very kind," replied Wilmot, bowing to the reporter, who was moving away.

"I could not keep from overhearing what that meddlesome woman said," went on the widow, "and I can not tell you how sorry I am. We must look about and see what can be done. Run up to my rooms—third floor in this house—any afternoon and take tea with me. I am always in at four." Something in the woman's tone vaguely soothed him, but he hardly heard what she was saying. He was thinking of Muriel Fairchild and her gentle sympathy when she should hear of his misfortune. She had counted so confidently on the success of this particular book.

He saw Chester and Miss Weyland coming towards him. "I'm awfully sorry, old man," said the former. "Miss Hatch has just told me about the failure. But never mind; we'll see what can be done. I'll help you look into it."

"Such a pity," observed Miss Weyland to Mrs. Sennett. "He has only been in the city two days, and this is the sort of welcome he has received. Oh, these publishers make me furious! They are never reliable!"

"I think we'd better go, Burian," proposed

Chester. "I fancy you don't care to talk the matter over with strangers, and they will surround you in a minute." "I am ready," replied Wilmot. "You are all very kind."

"I feel almost like crying," declared Mrs. Sennett, clasping his hand as he rose. "I would give anything to lessen your disappointment. I can see that you are greatly troubled."

"Oh, it may come out all right," replied Wilmot, with an effort to appear indifferent.

"Don't forget my invitation," was the widow's parting reminder. "Remember I am in every afternoon at four."

"Thanks; I shall not forget," replied Wilmot.

"Take him right up to the studio," he heard Miss Weyland say to Chester. "We'll join you before long. I'd go back with you now, but Papa wants me to meet Lady Stuart. Mrs. Langdon tells him she wants a portrait and he thought if I met her, Lady Stuart would feel more at home in the studio; you understand, I know."

"I thought we'd have a talk with Frank Harrison if he is in his rooms" answered Chester. "He can advise us better than anyone else."

"You can all go up to the studio," urged the girl. "I want to know how it comes out."

"All right," said Chester; "we'll wait for you there. "Good bye."

CHAPTER IX.

"YOU certainly are having bad luck," said Chester, as he and Wilmot were walking up Broadway. "I don't think such a thing would make me lose much sleep, but I know how important it is to a beginner.

"I feel like a tramp," replied Wilmot, bitterly. "I gave up my profession at home, and on the hope of my book attracting attention, came up here to begin a new life. I know it is an accident when a book is accepted. I might try half a lifetime and never get mine taken again. The fact that Wellington and Clegg liked it would have no weight with any other house, for if they had been better judges of literature they would not have failed."

"We'll talk to Harrison," returned Chester. "He has published half a dozen books, and will know what is best."

They found the poet and essayist in his little sitting-room at the head of the stairs. He had just brewed and drunk a cup of his favorite tea, and was sitting in the bay-window lazily smoking a cigarette.

"Come in," he cried out hospitably as he rec-

ognized Chester in the corridor. "Glad to make your acquaintance," he added to Wilmot. "I know who you are, and a friend of Chester's is ever welcome. Have you had tea, gentlemen?"

"At Dorothea's," declined Chester.

"I thought you were not going there any more!" said Harrison, with half a sneer. "But I knew you would when I heard Weyland say he and Miss Aline were going. It is a shame, Chester. She doesn't care for that kind of crowd, and Weyland ought not to drag her with him."

"Both Dorothea and Lady Stuart want their portraits painted and Dorothea wrote too plainly to be misunderstood that she wanted him to bring his daughter," explained Chester with a frown.

Harrison threw his cigarette away, and began to roll another.

"It's a shame!" he repeated hotly. "A thousand years of that sort of thing would not affect her, but it is no place for her all the same. But there was no harm in you going, Chester, and I am glad you took your friend."

"Mr. Burian and I want to have a business talk with you," said Chester, abruptly. "We promised Miss Weyland that we'd wait in the studio, and that we'd ask you to go up."

Harrison bent the paper at the end of his cigarette and thrust it between his fine teeth.

"I'll take off my smoking-jacket and follow," he said with undisguised eagerness. "When do you expect them back?"

"In a few minutes."

Wilmot had never before been in a well-arranged studio, and had he felt less depressed, he would more fully have enjoyed the beautiful long room with its curving roof of frosted glass, its massive Japanese screens of carved wood, rare tapestries, paintings, statues, luxurious lounges, puffy pillows, Oriental rugs, and general profusion of curios gathered from various parts of the world. The windows were wide plate glass, as clear as crystal, and the view stretched out over the housetops to the Hudson.

Scarcely a word was spoken between the two friends. Wilmot fancied Chester's face had worn a little cloud since the allusion to Miss Weyland by Harrison a few minutes before. Chester picked up a tray of cigars, and mechanically offering them to Wilmot, took one himself.

"Thanks," said Wilmot, taking a cigar and then returning it to the tray. "I won't smoke here."

"She doesn't mind," said Chester, quickly; "she often begs us to do it."

"I don't feel in the mood for it, thank you."

Shortly afterwards Frank Harrison came in, panting from his climb up the stairs. He was in evening dress, and appeared very stylish and handsome. Wilmot had heard that he was something of an aristocrat.

"Have a dinner engagement," he explained, as he went to a sideboard, cracked some ice, and drank a glass of *crême de menthe*, then he threw himself on a lounge and began to feel in his pocket for his cigarette-paper.

"Well," he said, "let's get the business over before the young lady comes."

"She is interested in it also," explained Chester coldly. "It is about Burian's novel of which I told you."

"Yes, yes, I remember," Harrison's glance went to Wilmot's face, inquiringly, "and I am curious to see it out."

"It was accepted by Wellington and Clegg," added Chester.

"Thunder! you don't say so!" Harrison sat up erect.

"We have just heard of the failure," went on Chester. "It is an unusually great disappointment, for, as you know, this is Burian's first book. It was to be a sort of starter; it would have kind of piloted him into the open sea, you know."

"Very unfortunate!" ejaculated Harrison, in a tone of genuine sympathy.

"I thought you might give us a helpful suggestion," went on Chester; "you know the publishing field as well as anyone."

"I have just been reading about the failure in the *Progress*," rejoined Harrison. "The house was besieged this afternoon by authors clamoring for their manuscripts, and it appears that they can't even recover them. But if Mr. Burian will pardon what I say, it seems to me that, in the case of a first book, a new writer would be about as well off with his manuscript in the possession of a bankrupt firm as to have it on hand to hawk about till it is worn to shreds. You know, Chester, how hard it is to get a hearing, and how apt publishers are to think that new men can't possibly supply their needs. There is some talk about the creditors allowing Wellington and Clegg to resume business, and in that case Mr. Burian's book would stand a chance of being published by them, so I hardly know what to advise. If he takes it from them he might not easily find another publisher, and if he leaves it with them, it may eventually be brought out. He must take his choice between two evils."

"You are very kind," replied Wilmot. "I shall go down to-morrow and try to see the firm."

"And do not give up till you have exhausted every resource," put in Chester. "In the end it may turn out that the failure was the best thing that could have happened." He bent forward to look through the open door into the corridor.

Miss Weyland and her father were coming.

After Wilmot was introduced to the artist, who received him very cordially, Harrison and Weyland began to talk of the latter's work, and went into an adjoining room to look at a portrait the artist was finishing. Seeing Chester and Miss Weyland in close conversation at the piano, Wilmot turned into a bay-window without being noticed by them.

Harrison's cold, professional remarks on the situation had not lessened his depression. The sun was just going down beyond a stretch of brown roofs; night was coming on. He felt very lonely. The actions of Chester and Miss Weyland convinced him that they were lovers, and this discovery brought Muriel Fairchild to his mind. He felt his blood rise hotly to his face as he remembered confessing to her that he was going to New York with scarcely a hundred dollars in his possession. She had delicately hinted that she would willingly advance a small sum of money to him, and he had only escaped being urged to take

it by assuring her that as soon as his book was published he would be able to dispose of sufficient literary work to sustain him. She would now read of the failure in the papers and fully comprehend his financial condition. This thought stung him to the quick.

"You have a fine view from this window, Miss Weyland," he said, turning to the couple. "This must be an ideal residence, up here above the clouds."

"How prettily you put it," she smiled. "You are, however, seeing it at its best; often the clouds are of smoke and they rise to our level only to stay with us. Mr. Chester tells me we are to have you to dinner with us at our favorite café down stairs. We are going to try to make you forget that ugly disappointment."

"Thank you. But you must really excuse me this time," answered Wilmot. "I don't feel very well, and I have several important matters to attend to at once."

But when he reached his room half an hour later, he found that he had nothing to attend to except to write to Muriel Fairchild. This he accomplished in as hopeful a strain as possible. After the letter was ended, he lowered his head to his folded arms to think. After awhile his troubled

thoughts became confused, and sleep took possession of his senses.

He was awakened about ten o'clock by the voices of Chester and Miss Weyland as they were returning from the café. A few minutes later Chester came slowly back from the studio and entered his room. Wilmot looked from one of his windows. There was a yellow glare over Union Square, and further on gleamed the star-like lights on the tower of Madison Square Garden.

CHAPTER X.

THE next morning as Wilmot was going out, he met Frank Harrison on the stairs.

"I presume you still intend to see Wellington and Clegg," was his cordial greeting.

"If I can gain admittance," replied Wilmot.

"You may fail in that," said the poet; "but in any case I want you to drop into the editorial rooms of my publishers, King and Burton. I have written this note of introduction for you to my friend Lester. Even if they can't help you in this matter it will do you no harm to know them. They bring out all my books, and there are no better people in the United States."

"I appreciate your kindness," said Wilmot, taking the note, "I shall not fail to call on them."

Half an hour later he was at the entrance of the building occupied by Wellington and Clegg. The door was closed, and a man in the dress of a laborer was rapping for admittance.

"They have cut the bell-wire," he observed to Wilmot with a smile, and he gave the door several sharp blows with his fist.

"I want to see the firm," said Wilmot. "Can you tell me how to get at them?"

"I am helpin' about the stock-takin' under the deputy sheriff—doin' liftin' and truckin'," replied the man. "Mr. Wellington was in the office ten minutes ago. Mr. Clegg is down sick at home in Brooklyn. I hear somebody comin' now; you can go in with me if you wish. The public is excluded, but just come right on up. It will be your best chance."

The door was opened by the elevator boy.

"Got to walk up," he informed the laborer; "they told me to stop running."

The man grumbled as he began to mount the stairs. Wilmot followed deliberately.

On the office floor, behind a counter framed with glass, stood Mr. Wellington. He was slender, middle-aged, with iron-gray hair, and looked nervous and tired. The boy opened the gate and Wilmot went in and introduced himself.

"Yes, yes, I remember the story," said Wellington in the tone of a man who is endeavoring to be courteous under trying circumstances. "The last letter I had from you was from the South. By Jove," he added bitterly, "you got here in a hurry! Bad news travels fast, and so do those who receive it."

"I was already in New York, but did not hear of your trouble till yesterday." Wilmot spoke

gently. The aspect of the man, with his rumpled hair and blood-shot eyes, roused his pity, and almost caused him to lose sight of his own misfortune.

"Well, you have certainly acted more decently than the others. I believe they would have torn me limb from limb, yesterday, if they could have got at me. I wish I could help you; I know that's what you came for, but I am as helpless as a child. The whole business is in the hands of the deputy sheriff, and nothing I could say would have any weight. If it were not for this trouble, Mr. Burian, I'd ask you to lunch with me and talk over 'The Achievements of a Modern Saint.' I don't read all our books, but our best reader spoke so enthusiastically about the original treatment of your novel and its dramatic force that I took the manuscript home with me. My wife read it first, and kept me awake telling me about the plot till after two o'clock one night, then I literally devoured the story. It is a rattling good thing, and if I am not mistaken you have produced a splendid seller."

Wilmot thanked him. "I hoped," he ventured, "that I might get the manuscript and offer it elsewhere."

"That's what they all want," frowned Well-

ington, and his tone suddenly grew cold. "But I can do nothing. The manuscripts are all locked in the vaults and the deputy sheriff has the combination. Our affairs are very much complicated. We have a branch house in Chicago, and a printing establishment in New Haven, and nothing can be touched till a complete settlement is made all round."

"And it would be sometime before I could get possession of the manuscript."

"Three or four months, if at all," said Mr. Wellington. "News-dealers and booksellers all over the country owe us for consigned books, and all those accounts must be settled. You see, we hold your contract to allow us the right to publish the story, and there was no stipulation as to the date of publication."

"But surely," replied Wilmot with awakening spirit, "if your house fails and alters its name, or style of doing business, I have a right to withdraw my manuscript since it was with Wellington and Clegg I made the contract."

The publisher smiled wearily.

"That would be a question for the court to decide, and such a decision could not be reached without a good deal of expense, nor before we know positively if we shall be in a shape to use

the book ourselves—in case we are allowed to continue business."

"I understand," answered Wilmot, "and I am sorry I disturbed you so unnecessarily."

Wellington's wan face took on a faint suggestion of sympathy.

"You are certainly a good-natured fellow," he said; "and I am very sorry to interfere with your plans at all. I promise if I see any way to aid you in the matter I'll do it."

Wilmot lost no time in going to the office of King and Burton, and sending in Harrison's note to Lester by the office-boy. Lester came out himself in a few moments.

"I am glad to know you, Mr. Burian," he said; "Mr. Harrison writes me that you want to see us in regard to your literary work. I am now occupied chiefly with matters pertaining to our journal, the *Literary Day*, but if you will come in I will introduce you to our manager, Mr. Richard Soul. He is in his office now"—pointing to the rooms on the right—"just wait here till I see if he is disengaged."

In a moment Lester returned. "Come in," he said, opening the door leading to the editorial rooms; "he is a nice, approachable man, and is very popular with our writers."

After shaking hands with Mr. Soul, Wilmot sat down by his desk and briefly related his experiences concerning the placing of his manuscript with Wellington and Clegg.

"You certainly made a mistake," Mr. Soul said, when he had finished, "and had you been on the spot, I am sure you would have shown the manuscript to some other house before you let them have it. I wish I could help you. I am very much interested in what you have told me, and while I am not in the position to make any promises about our bringing out the book— not having seen it—yet I will say that I hope you will give us the opportunity to see the story if you get hold of it again. Perhaps you retained a copy of it."

"I did not."

"That's bad."

Mr. Soul picked up his pen and drew a pad of paper towards him, and Wilmot understood that the conversation was at an end. He rose.

"I know I am taking up valuable time," he said.

"I have just remembered overlooking an important letter," said Mr. Soul apologetically, and he extended his hand. "I am not in a position to help you, anyway, not having the opinion of

our readers on your story. But if you get hold of the manuscript you will confer a favor on us by allowing us to examine it."

Wilmot went down into the crowded street. The sun was beating hotly upon the pavements, and the roar and bustle of the great thoroughfare jarred on him unpleasantly. An elevated train thundered along overhead, throwing its moving shadow on the walls of the buildings. He thought of the unfinished short story on his table, and turned homeward. He was not sure that he could write a line with that awful fear of poverty upon him, but he intended to try. He would endeavor, also, to keep his mind off the novel on which he had based so many hopes. But this was hard to do ; it seemed that a vital part of him was held in bondage.

CHAPTER XI.

AS President of the Dadeville Literary Club, Miss Sarah Benson secretly resented Muriel's not taking part in the weekly meetings. She was compelled to admit that Muriel had received more advantages than any other girl in the village, and was, therefore, all the more fitted to fulfil the duties Miss Sarah would willingly have assigned to her.

Muriel had traveled; she had been to big watering places in the North, and while Muriel had never boasted of the fact, it had been whispered among the club members that she actually knew Miss Mary Dyke, the New England writer of character stories. It was said that Miss Fairchild had met her while studying in New York and that an enduring friendship had sprung up between them.

Miss Sarah thought that it would be quite a feather in the cap of her club if she could manage to secure such a brilliant literary star as Miss Dyke to read to the club from her famous stories and thought that her desire might be gained if Muriel would invite Miss Dyke to pay her a visit.

She was on her way down to see Muriel now.

So many people had smiled at her failure to induce Muriel to join her movement that she had determined to make a more strenuous effort in that direction. Muriel was too influential to be passed over.

Miss Sarah took strong, new-womanish steps. She was tall, erect, thirty-five, stern-featured and full of plans for the uplifting of her down-trodden sex. The girls said she did not know how to dress, but that did not matter, for she was intellectual.

Muriel saw her coming across the lawn and stifled a little cry of disappointment that drew her mother's eyes to the window.

"You really must go in, daughter," said Mrs. Fairchild. "She told me at prayer-meeting the other day that she was coming to see you."

Muriel sighed as she arranged her hair at the glass and her mother sent the servant to invite the visitor into the parlor. It was a very warm afternoon three days after Wilmot's departure. Muriel had put on her prettiest organdie, a dainty sky blue affair made over silk, and she had never appeared to a better advantage.

"I hope I am not keeping you from going out," said Miss Sarah, rising.

"Oh, not in the least!" said Muriel. "Sit

down; I may go out when it is cooler, but I have plenty of time."

Miss Benson resumed her chair and began to rock. Her shoes had low heels and were broad and thick-soled. It was plain that she had something to say.

"I came to talk to you about the prospectus of our club," she began. "We have the best programme for next fall that I have ever arranged. You really must join us. You are setting a bad example to other girls in town. Two have already said that they wouldn't join any movement you are not in."

"How foolish of them," said Muriel, coloring. "I can not, however, become a member. The truth is, I am trying to prevail on papa to allow me to resume my vocal lessons in New York and I think he will finally consent."

Miss Sarah's chair had come to a stand-still, but it started on again with increased impetus.

"Ah!" she ejaculated, and she flushed with mixed disappointment and anger. "Dadeville was never good enough for you. You are going away again. I presume you will settle down and live among the Yankees before long."

"I can not get the vocal training here that I need, that is certain," said Muriel, biting her lip to hide a smile which she could not restrain.

The President of the literary club shrugged her shoulders; her lip curled; this young chip of a female should not see that she was necessary to the literary progress of Dadeville.

"I really was not sure how you would do, Muriel, even if you joined," she said, with an acid glance at Muriel's dress and dainty slippers. "I have found that many of the girls who are considered fairly bright can not write a paper on the most ordinary topic. They do not seem to have the power to grasp what is needed."

Muriel was only human. She allowed herself to smile quite broadly at this thrust.

"And yet," she observed calmly, "some of them must really be all that even you could wish, Miss Sarah. Someone told me that little Addie Turner, who is surely not sixteen, read a wonderfully comprehensive paper on the 'Culminative Period of German Literature.'"

Miss Sarah winced; her glance wavered, but she was not defeated.

"Oh, yes, some of my girls are developing. There is no mistake about that." Then she remained silent a moment before firing a shot that she had ready.

"I understand, Muriel, that you are responsible for Wilmot Burian's giving up his profession and going to New York."

"Oh," said Muriel changing color slightly. "I could not flatter myself that I could influence him either to stay or go."

"Well, you had much to do with it, you may be sure of that," said Miss Benson almost sneering. "No one else here has praised his little stories except you. Really you ought to have shown him that it was a silly thing for him to hope to make his way among men of letters. Why, he is not even a well-read man. I once drew him out just to see if there was anything in him, but really he does not seem to know much."

"Have you ever read one of his sketches, Miss Sarah?"

Muriel leaned forward and gazed into the face of the old maid.

"Yes, one," replied Miss Benson, "and I am sorry to have to say that it had absolutely nothing in it. Who wants to know anything about these mountain people and their wretched dialect that we have heard all our lives."

"I am a warm friend of his," returned Muriel coldly, "and I may be prejudiced in his favor, but I don't think I am. I have liked everything he has produced. His novel, which he allowed me to read in the manuscript, was beautifully written—carefully written. There is no dialect in it, but

even if there were, the dialect of all sections ought to be preserved."

"You have more to be sorry for than I thought," interrupted Miss Benson. "Now, if I had encouraged a young lawyer to give up his profession and go into literature, and he had gone off and met with such a disaster as has befallen Wilmot Burian I should not be so satisfied about it—so unconcerned as you seem."

"Disaster!" repeated Muriel, off her guard, "why, what do you mean?"

"Have you not heard the news?"

"I do not know what you are talking about," answered Muriel, staring fixedly at the speaker. "What has happened to him?"

"Well, really I may be making a mistake, so I ought not to listen to gossip without knowing whether it is true or not. But it seems to me that when he left our home paper mentioned that his novel had been accepted by Wellington and Clegg of New York. Am I correct in the name?"

"Yes, that was the firm," said Muriel, paling in suspense; "but what about it?"

A glow of victory lighted up the stern features of Miss Benson. For a moment she simply fingered her notebook and pencil in her lap, then:

"My father takes the *New York Progress*, and the paper which came this morning says that Wellington and Clegg have just failed."

Muriel could only stare at Miss Benson helplessly.

"Failed?" she gasped, "are you sure?"

"Quite sure, and that is not all. The paper says many young authors are wild with disappointment, because it seems they can not, for some legal reason, get possession of their manuscripts. It is said that many authors will lose heavily by the failure. My father thinks Wilmot Burian had paid a considerable sum to the publishers, and that he will lose every cent of it."

"I know personally," gasped Muriel, "that he did not pay them any money."

"Oh, of course, he would not confess it to you—it would not be natural for him to do so, but it is more than likely that he did. Father thinks that they accepted it just on the eve of ruin without even reading it and simply to get his money. It is reported all over town that he has lost all he had and is absolutely in want up there. If I had been in your place, Muriel, I should have shown him that it is a presumptous thing for him to aspire so high."

"I know—absolutely know that Wilmot did not pay them any money," said Muriel in a tone full of agony, "and I hope you will contradict the report wherever you hear it mentioned."

But the request fell on closed ears. That was a phase of the situation Miss Benson did not want to believe in. For years she had been the chief literary light of Dadeville, and she was far from being ready to admit that another in the town—a young unsuccessful lawyer had actually had a book accepted that had merit in it. She rose, the better to divest herself of the suggestion advanced by Muriel, and hoping that Muriel would come to see her soon, and think better of her decision in regard to the club, she departed.

Muriel stood in the front door, watching Miss Benson walk stiffly down to the gate. When the visitor had disappeared, she turned back into the drawing-room and sank on a lounge.

Mrs. Fairchild came to her a few minutes later.

"What is the matter, darling?" she asked tenderly. She sat down by her daughter and drew her white face to her shoulder.

"Oh, mamma, Wilmot has met with such a misfortune! He—" Muriel choked up and went no farther.

"I know, darling," said Mrs. Fairchild. "Your father has just told me of the report in town. I am so sorry for him. It is such a great blow. I wish he were here now. I'd comfort him. I'd show him more friendship than I have done. I would, darling, for your sake."

Muriel covered her face with her hands. She seemed trying in vain to sob.

"Cry, darling," said Mrs. Fairchild, her own eyes filling; "cry. It will do you good." And then with her head in her mother's lap, Muriel burst into tears and sobbed over the greatest sorrow she had ever known.

CHAPTER XII.

"I WAS afraid you would not come," said Mrs. Sennett to Wilmot when he called in obedience to his promise on the afternoon of his visit to Mr. Soul's office. She came to meet him, holding an ugly pug dog in her arms.

"I almost missed your message," said Wilmot. "Chester was very busy, it seems, and forgot to deliver it till half an hour ago."

"I am certainly glad he thought of it in time," smiled Mrs. Sennett. "I think if you hadn't come I should have driven round to your house on the way to the park to ask about you. I have been so much worried over your bad news. It kept me awake nearly all last night. You have a very refined, sensitive face, and although you tried to appear unconcerned yesterday, I saw you were suffering tortures. I am awfully sorry for you."

Wilmot sank into the soft cushions of a luxurious lounge. Her words and manner were soothing, and a sensation of restful languor stole over him. The artistic splendor of the room, the glimpses through drawn *portières* of other rooms equally attractive, appealed to his appreciation

of the beautiful. The soft strains of the piano and violin in an adjoining apartment were heard, and a delicate perfume of violets permeated the air.

"It's good of you to invite me here," he said. "I hardly knew what to do with myself this afternoon. I found this morning that I could not recover that manuscript, and, as I seem unable to get to work, there seems nothing before me, except to walk the streets, and—"

"And you are really too tired for that," interrupted Mrs. Sennett. "You needn't deny it; I can see it in your eyes." She put her pet on the floor, and brought another pillow to him. "Don't refuse me," she said, arranging it on the lounge; "you shall not be formal with me even if it is your first call. Put your head on this, and lie down, and rest."

"O, no, thank you!" he said quickly. "I am all right."

"Do as I tell you!" commanded Mrs. Sennett. She reached for a cut-glass decanter in a stand of silver, and poured out a glass of cordial. "Drink this while I am preparing the tea, and lie down or I shall not like you."

Blushingly he obeyed. He had never done such a thing in his life, yet it seemed a natural

thing to do. She crossed the room, set an electric fan in motion, then came back to the table, and rang a bell. The maid entered with a tray containing tea cups of rare, fragile china, a copper tea-kettle, swinging over a spirit-lamp, and a dainty Dresden tea-pot.

"Dot will stay with you," she said, lifting the dog to a place beside him. "As a rule he does not like strangers, and cuts up very badly, but he has taken a fancy to you."

"Even your dog is hospitable," observed Wilmot, with a smile.

Mrs. Sennett laughed.

"One would know by that remark that you are a Southerner," she said. "Southerners know how to flatter! I repeat, sir, that you are going to make a great social success here this season. After you left yesterday, Mrs. Langdon and I were absolutely flooded with questions about you. You must not think too much about your work, and ought to go in for a good time."

"My plans are unsettled since the failure of my publishers," said he.

Mrs. Sennett's smile vanished. She looked older when serious. Still it was not easy for him to realize that she had lived twenty years longer than he. The room had been purposely dark-

ened, and the rays from the pink globes gave a rosy tint to her complexion. The mass of silky brown hair was not her own, but he was too genuine to suspect that fact.

"What is the trouble?" she asked, lighting the spirit-lamp, and bending low to see if it were burning evenly. "I can not get possession of the manuscript. The matter is tied up indefinitely."

"And it is the work of several months, I presume," said the woman, drawing herself up and looking down on him sympathetically.

"Of years," he answered, simply.

"Oh," she exclaimed, almost as if the word had been evoked by a sudden shock, "what a shame!" She sat down at the tea-table, and leaned her head on her jeweled hand. He saw her start as with a sudden inspiration, and then:

"Money will do anything these days; have you thought of bribery?" He smiled grimly as he remembered the few dollars in his possession and the gloomy outlook ahead of him.

"I don't think it would do any good," he replied evasively; "besides it would seem hard to have to pay for one's just rights."

"That's true," she said thoughtfully; "but still if your career is suffering because that book is tied up in a financial ruin, I should think even

bribery would be justifiable. Now is the time for the book to appear, and it must—I say it *must*, my friend!"

He could formulate no reply. The awful unpleasantness of his condition fell upon his consciousness with redoubled weight. He would be unable to maintain himself longer in the metropolis, and there was nothing for him to do except to return to Dadeville while he still had enough money for the journey. He heard his father's sneering remarks and the galling gossip of the town. He imagined himself meeting Muriel, and felt his blood beat hotly in his face.

"Will you have cream and sugar?" Mrs. Sennett was proffering a cup of tea. He nodded and thanked her. Then she changed the subject adroitly, and under the charm of her conversation he felt his heart growing lighter, and before he knew it, six o'clock struck.

"Will you not promise to come to see me tomorrow afternoon at four?" she asked, following him to the door leading to the elevator. "I shall want to see you particularly."

"I will come," said he hesitatingly, "if—"

"I want no ifs about it," she said, "can I count on you at four o'clock sharp?"

"Thank you, I shall come," he promised.

CHAPTER XIII.

CAN you call at once to see us in regard to the manuscript in the possession of Wellington & Clegg?"

"Yours truly,

"KING & BURTON."

That was the message Wilmot received just after he had breakfasted the following morning. He had started to work on his short story, but put on his hat, and caught a down-town car for the publishing house.

In the sales-room below the editorial offices, Wilmot met Lester, who paused to speak to him.

"I presume you are going up to Mr. Soul's office," he remarked. "I can't imagine what he wants. He asked me for your address late yesterday afternoon. He is there now, and happens to be disengaged, you'd better go up at once."

As Wilmot entered, Richard Soul smiled genially, and pushed a chair to the side of his desk.

"Glad to see you so promptly, sit down and have a smoke," he said, taking a cigar from a box, and pushing it towards his visitor.

Wilmot declined. He wondered what could have happened to have caused the manager to be

so very cordial, and smile so knowingly. For a moment neither spoke. Mr. Soul lighted a match, watched the flame grow round and white in the palm of his hand, and then he began to smoke.

"What luck with Wellington and Clegg?" he asked, leaning back in his easy chair.

"None at all; I haven't seen them since I talked with you."

"Why?"

The word seemed to cut a round hole in the smoke about the manager's face.

"I did not think it would do any good to disturb them further. Wellington said he could do nothing for me. Besides he hopes that they may make a settlement of some sort and resume publication; in that case, they might use the book."

"Would you rather have us bring it out?"

"Yes, decidedly; I had no idea till I got to New York that they had such a small concern, nor did I know of the magnitude of your business."

Richard Soul smiled.

"We have really the largest house on this side of the water, and an important branch in London. We have it in our power to do more for a new

writer than any three publishing houses in America."

"I can easily believe it," replied Wilmot, still studying the face of the manager.

Mr. Soul seemed to have an appreciation for dramatic situations. He fixed Wilmot's face with a sharp, studious gaze, and said:

"I suppose you could not easily get possession of that manuscript, but if you had the story and offered it to me, I should pass it on without looking at it."

Wilmot's heart sank. It seemed to him that the smile of the manager was mocking him. He pulled himself together and tried to speak indifferently.

"You mean that you would refuse it without even reading it?"

"I mean that I would accept it."

Wilmot stared. Could it be possible that Mr. Soul was jesting with him?

"You would accept it without giving it a reading?" he asked incredulously.

Mr. Soul rang his bell, and as the office-boy entered, he gave him some letters to post.

"Yes, I should take it without reading it," he said, after the boy had gone. Silence fell for a moment; hundreds of thoughts were battling in

the brain of the young author. Mr. Soul sat smiling in the smoke of his cigar.

"You really surprise me," Wilmot presently said.

"I knew you would be surprised," said the manager, breaking into a laugh. "Something has happened in regard to your story in the shape of a rare coincidence. I'll tell you about it. Five minutes after you left yesterday, a man called. He sat in the chair you are in now. He was one of our best readers. At odd times he reads for other houses. He has been reading regularly for Wellington and Clegg, but never acknowledged it till they failed. We were talking about their editorial judgment yesterday, and of his own accord, he spoke of having read a Southern novel for them, which he said was one of the finest stories he had seen in many years. I asked him who the author was, and he mentioned your name. He thinks the book will undoubtedly make a hit. Of course, I did not tell him you had come to me. But I want to say seriously, if you can possibly get hold of your property that we want to bring it out. If we handle it, we will put you before the public in a number of ways, beginning with a big edition."

"Can you think of any way by which I can

get the manuscript?" asked Wilmot, almost under his breath.

"I can not; our reader says Wellington is a good-hearted fellow, but that Clegg is as mean as men are made. They intend to make some sort of compromise with their creditors, and resume business, taking their time about using accepted manuscripts. If they go ahead, the law would probably hold you to your contract, and I am sorry to say it looks as if they are going to resume. You certainly made a great mistake in offering it to such an unreliable house. As far as we are concerned we don't take up any but promising people. There are a dozen widely read authors in this country whose names should not appear on our catalogues if they offered us their books for nothing. We avoid sensations. We once accepted a good book by a young woman from the West, and just before publication she raised a big sensation by going on the stage, and getting mixed up in several unpleasant affairs, and we returned her manuscript. She offered to run it under a *nom de plume*, but we still refused. We do not have to depend on that sort of thing to circulate our books, and it would not be just to our authors to list them with such people."

"I think you are right," said Wilmot, rising. "And I am sorry I cannot turn my manuscript over to you."

The manager held out his hand.

"I really wish we could handle your book," he said, "and if by any accident you should get it away from those people, bring it round."

The rest of that morning Wilmot spent roaming about the streets. In his wanderings, he found himself near noon in front of Wellington and Clegg's. The door was closed, and on it was nailed a notice which read, "Positively no admittance to anyone."

While he stood there, he heard steps on the stairs within.

The door opened, and the same laborer to whom he had spoken the day before came out.

"You can't see anybody to-day," he said cordially. "They would cuss you black and blue. Mr. Clegg is up there in charge. He threatened to kick an author down stairs just now for begging for his manuscript. Clegg says they are going ahead and intend to manage their own affairs. Was it about a book you wanted to see 'em?"

"Yes."

"Well, I wouldn't bother 'em. I heard a

young author tell Mr. Clegg he'd be satisfied to have 'em publish his novel any time in the next two years."

Wilmot thanked the man and went back to his room, took up his pen and tried to work, but he could think of nothing save the opportunity he was losing by not being able to get possession of his manuscript. It was past luncheon time, but he had no appetite.

CHAPTER XIV.

"WHAT can be the matter?" Mrs. Sennett asked Wilmot that afternoon as he entered her drawing-room. "You look pale and completely fagged out. You need not deny it, you are still worrying over that manuscript!"

"I can not dispute it," he replied, and then he told her of his conversation with Mr. Soul.

"So you really would like to get possession of the manuscript," the woman said, her eyes twinkling.

"I can think of nothing I desire more," he answered, despondently. "If I had it, you see, I could at once place it with King and Burton."

"And would they satisfy you as publishers?"

"They would be my choice out of all New York." Mrs. Sennett leaned nearer to him. She seemed excited.

"I wonder if you would scold me if you discovered that I had been meddling in your affairs," she said, without raising her eyes.

"I should be pleased to know you were interested in them at all," he said, studying her face, and wondering what she was hinting at. She looked straight into his eyes, her own were sparkling.

"You remember," said she, "that you told me how anxious you were to recover the manuscript. Well, I knew it was no business of mine, and that you might not like my interference, but I could not rest until I had seen Mr. Wellington myself. So the first thing this morning, I put on my prettiest gown, wore my diamonds, and drove down there in my carriage."

"What!" he exclaimed, "you went—"

"Don't interrupt me," she broke in. "I know you are going to scold me for being so bold and presumptuous, but after thinking it all over I could not help it. I have met Mr. Wellington several times, and happen to know that he treats women with far more consideration than he does men. I sent up for Mr. Wellington. A man will go to a woman in her carriage when he wouldn't go to her anywhere else. Ordinarily he feels he has a right to retreat or hide but he never will fail to go to a well-dressed woman in her own brougham.

"Well, he came down ink-stained, care-worn, and not particularly well-groomed. At first he wouldn't give me the slightest encouragement, but I had managed to get to him about lunch time and asked him to drive with me to Delmonico's. He consented. The drive in the fresh air seemed

to do him good. He kept looking at me. The old rascal thought I was indiscreet. At the table, when he caught sight of what I ordered to eat, he warmed up and returned of his own accord to the battle-field.

"'That young man has a promising out-look, Mrs. Sennett,' he said.

"'If we can keep life in him,' I answered.

"'Is he ill?' Wellington asked, too much under the spell of the dinner to follow me closely.

"'Not in a physical sense,' I replied. 'But we'll never get much out of him if his best work is buried in the *debris* of other men's ventures.'

"'That's a fact, Mrs. Sennett,' he replied sheepishly, as if he had no right to disagree with me and eat my dinners. 'I am willing to release my claim to the book, but the deputy sheriff is in charge, and then Clegg would never give his consent—you see we hope to resume. I am sorry for Burian; he looks worried. The truth is, however, that it all depends on the deputy sheriff.'

"'Is he fond of good dinners?' I asked.

"'He has a jealous wife who watches him like a hawk,' said Wellington; 'but I will give you a suggestion, Mrs. Sennett,' he went on attacking the *paté de foie gras* as if he had not dined in a week. 'I really believe he is a man

who would not despise a tip—that is, to serve a lady. Now if you would see him and tell him I am willing to let you have the manuscript, he might really—'

" 'I understand,' I replied; and then I changed the subject. We spent an hour at the table, and when we rose it was half past two. Then I asked for the deputy sheriff's address. He gave it to me, and we parted. I drove down to the City Hall as fast as I could.

"The deputy sheriff was not in, but his assistant was, and I lost no time in making him an offer, telling him I wanted the matter settled without delay. He went into an adjoining room and I heard him telephoning to someone. Then he came back to me and said the matter could be easily arranged, that the deputy sheriff was then up at Wellington and Clegg's, and that if I would call to-morrow, I should have the manuscript. The plan did not suit me. I wanted to strike while the iron was hot, besides I knew you were coming to see me this afternoon, and I wanted to save you from another restless night.

" 'I want the matter attended to now,' I said firmly. 'Can't you give me a written order for it?'

"He seemed to approve of my suggestion,

but after he had written a note, and carefully sealed it with wax, he held it hesitatingly in his hand.

" 'Can't you call here to-morrow, or tell me where to send the manuscript?' he asked, dubiously.

" 'I want it this afternoon, or not at all,' I replied, and I took my purse from my pocket.

" 'I'll bring the manuscript to any address you name within an hour from now,' he said eagerly. 'I'll go up to Wellington and Clegg's after it myself.'

" 'My carriage is at the door, can't I drive you there?' I suggested.

" 'With pleasure,' he answered, as if relieved, and we rode up Broadway side by side. I felt like a thief set to catch a thief, but I was in my best gown and in his rough office clothes, he furnished a contrast that was in my favor."

Wilmot stared at her breathlessly.

"Did you get it?" he asked.

Mrs. Sennett rose and brought a package from her desk.

"I waited outside while he went into the publishers' office. Here it is, every page of it, even the contract you signed. I thought they might give you trouble, so I refused to reward him till

he had secured the contract. He said Mr. Wellington gave it to him."

Wilmot opened the parcel and ran through the type-written sheets. "It is all right," he said, you have saved me, Mrs. Sennett."

"I am glad to see you so happy over it."

"You must tell me how much—of course, I want to pay for—"

"If you begin to talk that way, we shall quarrel," interrupted Mrs. Sennett. "I did it for my own amusement, and I would not have missed the excitement of it for any amount."

"But, I shall—"

"Please don't say any more about it," broke in Mrs. Sennett, "or I shall feel uncomfortable. It is really not worth mentioning."

CHAPTER XV.

"YOU are a very lucky man," said Chester one night about a week later, as they left the café, where they usually dined, and turned into Broadway. "Your ups and downs would make a good story. And now that King and Burton have taken you up, there is absolutely nothing under your chariot wheels."

"But I must really get at something right away," answered Wilmot, his eyes on the glare of the lights of Madison Square ahead of them. You see, I can't expect to draw anything from my book till it has been out three months, and it will be six weeks before it is published."

"Have you written nothing lately?" asked Chester.

"Only one short story. I sent it to the *Decade*, hoping that the editor would recall that unfortunate blunder of mine, and at least give it a reading."

"Have you heard from him yet?"

"I only posted it yesterday."

"I am inclined to think you may get in there. The editor is bound to respect you for your unprofessional honesty in returning that check."

They entered one of the walks in Madison Square, and sat down near the fountain. The night was warm, and the spray cooled the air. Here they sat for more than an hour talking of old times and their hopes for the future. At one time Wilmot thought his friend was going to make him his confidant in regard to Miss Weyland, but Chester seemed purposely to avoid mentioning her name.

When they were returning to their rooms, they saw that the door of Frank Harrison's apartment was open. The poet was reading at a table on which stood a tall lamp with a green porcelain shade.

"I say, come in, you fellows," he called out as he heard them passing.

Chester paused at the door. "I am going up to the studio," he said. "Do you know if the Weylands are in?"

"They went up just now," replied Harrison, rising.

"You have nothing to do, Mr. Burian, have you?" asked the poet. "Come in awhile. James Fitch Ellerton is in the library looking over my reference book. He'll be through in a moment. I want you to know him. He is a type for you."

Wilmot accepted the invitation and Chester

went up to the studio. Harrison stepped to the threshold of the library adjoining.

"I say, Ellerton," he called out. "Come in here."

"I'm coming," a voice answered. "It's frightfully hot in this room."

The speaker finished his observation standing in the doorway. He was a tall, blonde young man with a straggling moustache, long tow-colored hair, and aquiline features.

"You did right," said Harrison. "Let me introduce you to Mr. Burian, the Southern author our house has just taken up."

"Happy to meet you," said Ellerton, putting his pencil and note-book into his pocket, and sitting down in an easy chair. Harrison has been telling me of your good luck, and of your conscientious methods. I haven't read that sketch of yours, 'The Repentance of Milburn' yet, but its on my list. They say its great. I used to do careful work myself, but I quit it when I got real hard up, and now I am known as the worst hack in America. You could put me into a novel. I am a character."

"Make him tell you about it," remarked Harrison, penciling a note on a piece of paper.

"Nothing could please me more, I am sure," replied Wilmot.

Ellerton reached for a ham sandwich, in a plate on Harrison's desk, and began to eat it.

"I was doing first-class work for a beginner," he mumbled. "No man's out-look could have been brighter. I got married. My expenses accumulated. My best work brought good prices, but I couldn't do it fast enough. One day Eve held out an apple to me. It was a check for $500 which she had received from the *Evening Fireside*, a fifth-class story paper. 'I made it in a month at odd times,' said she, 'and have kept up my better class work also.' Eve was a young lady friend of mine who was doing work on the best magazines. The serial for which she had received the check was blood and thunder stuff, and appeared over a *nom de plume*.

"The next day my rent was due and the *Columbian* sent back a yarn I had worked on for a month. I thought Eve's idea over and went to call on the editor of the *Evening Fireside*. She seemed pleased to talk about their needs and plans and gave me a stack of brain poison to look at. I saw at once I could do what she wanted and before I reached home I had a full-fledged plot twittering and hopping about in the empty places in my brain. Within the next month I had earned over $600 for a serial story

of high life in Russia (I have never been out of America) and an account of a trip of mine to the North Pole in a flying machine.

"My wife felt proud of me for the first time since our marriage, and went and boomed me to the landlord. He took his hat off the next time I passed him, and all the women in the house called on my wife, and said that they had always intended to write fiction, but had been prevented by babies and things. I told myself I'd stick to the *Evening Fireside* till I owned a little house in Harlem. It took two years to make all the payments, then I decided to return to respectability. I wrote a story, put my best polish on it and sent it to the *Columbian*. The editor sent it back, saying that he could not believe I had written it. He had blue-penciled it all over, and said he supposed I meant it as a joke. He ended by seriously asking me where I had been, and why I had given up literature."

"Did you give up conscientious work entirely?" asked Wilmot.

"I had to; I couldn't do it again if my life had depended on it. The temptation to earn money easily was stronger than my love of art. I have written nothing but trash for five years."

"And Eve?" Wilmot inquired, smiling; "what became of her?"

"She is editing the *Evening Fireside* on a salary of five thousand. In addition to editorial work, she is under contract to write six serial stories a year. She had three running at the same time last year under different names. She fell sick once and I had to take up the stories till she was well again. She was out of her head part of the time and I forgot what she wanted the characters to do, and got them in an awful tangle. But she rescued them finally, and said that the accident had been beneficial, as it had pulled her out of some old ruts on to new ground."

"You would not, then, advise a man to slight his work for the sake of earning money?" said Wilmot.

"Not unless he needs the money more than literary fame," said Ellerton. "As for myself I don't care a rap. I might not have set the world on fire anyway, and as it is, I can make my wife and children comfortable."

CHAPTER XVI.

"MY dear Wilmot," wrote Muriel Fairchild: "Your last letter bringing news of your final success with your novel after all the sorrow I had felt when I heard of Wellington and Clegg's failure made me inexplicably happy! You see, I knew what it meant to you to be so far away among strangers and meet with such an awful blow—to have that first child of your brain held in bondage, as it were, when you had hoped to introduce it to the public. I cried when I heard it. I confess it. So did mamma. We sat together and boo-hooed like two babies. She is your staunch friend now. It seems her eyes have been opened to what a writer has to undergo, and suffer to gain his point, and she admires you for undertaking so much. Nearly every day after the reception of the bad news she would inquire about what you were doing, and when I told her the other day that you had finally secured your manuscript and succeeded in placing it even more advantageously than before she actually clapped her hands. Even papa is leaning towards our side. Someone dared to say in his presence the other day that you had made a mistake in leaving Dadeville, and the dear old soul asked dryly: 'What, has he gone to the bad place?'—only papa didn't use a word with two syllables.

"Your last letter was a genuine treat. I could never tell you how much I enjoyed it. The experiences you had with those two publishers

were absolutely thrilling. Your new friend Mrs. Sennett was certainly a heroine. I am not surprised that you visit her so often, but you have forgotten that I am only a woman and possess my share of curiosity, else you would tell me more about her. Is she a widow, married, young or old, pretty or plain? Tell me what she is like, and what sort of gowns she wears. The truth is, my dear friend, that I suffered a good many pangs of jealousy when I read that she had secured your manuscript for you, when everything and everyone else had failed. Don't think me sentimental, but I have always wanted to help you in some material way, and have often been vexed at my helplessness.

"I am going to give you a surprise. My teacher, Madame Angier is coming to Atlanta to give a recital, and has promised to pay me a short visit when she passes through Dadeville, the day after to-morrow. It is not settled yet, but Mamma says when Papa meets her, and sees what an admirable, discreet woman she is that he will allow me to return to New York with her next week. If I can come, I shall wire you when to meet us at the station in Jersey City."

Burian folded the letter and started out for a walk. He hoped she would come, and yet the prospect did not make him exactly happy. He was afraid she might discover the financial straits he was in. He would have liked, also, to be in a position to pay her attentions, to escort her to

the theatres, to send her the flowers she loved,—in short, to have her see him as prosperous as Harrison or Chester.

Wilmot spent the whole of the next day in visiting newspaper offices, trying to secure a position as editorial writer. In every case he found it impossible even to see the editor, being required in the anteroom of each office to write his name and the nature of his business on a card. The office-boy invariably returned with the message that every place was filled.

Late in the afternoon he went over to Brooklyn to see the editor of a daily paper. The editor was not at his office, and Wilmot, tired and disappointed, started back to New York. He had spent all his money for breakfast that morning, and for car-fare through the day, except a lonely five-cent piece which he found in his waistcoat pocket, after paying his bridge fare to New York.

He felt very hungry, and decided not to spend it for anything but food. So, tired as he was, he began the long walk uptown. His hunger enticed him almost against his will to pass through the streets which contained cheap restaurants. Once he lingered near one of those charitable institutions known as the one-cent

coffee and soup stands, but the sight of the men and boys in soiled clothes, who stood at the counter eating and drinking from the thick plates and cups drove him onward.

Even the low restaurants, where sandwiches and meat pies could be obtained as cheap as five cents each, repulsed him. He felt instinctively that a man dressed as well as he would attract attention in such places and he shrank from entering them.

He passed the door of a bar-room, and as a customer came through the swinging doors he caught sight of the free lunch counter inside. By paying five cents for a glass of beer he would have a right to partake of the tempting things heaped up in the great platters. He had heard Chester say he had eaten at such places, but Wilmot walked past the entrance twice before he summoned up the courage to go in.

The customers, mostly rough laboring men, with luncheon-pails on their arms and short pipes in their mouths, stared at him as he paid for his glass of beer. He drank the beer slowly, the while eying the display of eatables. He decided that he would take a sandwich as he passed out. This he did, and ate it as he resumed his walk homeward.

Before going up to his room, he paused at a stationer's and looked at the latest issue of the *Evening Fireside*. He noticed a serial under a very sensational title, and wondered if it might be Ellerton's. But the short stories claimed his special interest. They seemed like smaller sins than the long ones. The sentences and paragraphs were curt and striking. He fancied one of the tales might bring twenty dollars.

Before he had reached his room a plot had come to him, and sitting down at his table, he dashed into the execution of a story. He was surprised to notice that he wrote easily and rapidly, and that it afforded him a sort of gratification that was somewhat akin to the feeling he had in producing better work. By two o'clock the story was finished. He ran over it, cutting out a word here and adding a phrase there, till the wording sounded smooth and thoroughly correct. He left the manuscript on the table, and prepared for bed.

"At least, I shall not starve," he said. "If such things are literary crimes this is not a capital offense, and it shall be the last. I have done it once, but I'll never depart from the ideal track again. To-morrow I'll try to sell it to the *Evening Fireside*, but no one—not even Chester shall ever know I did it."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE next morning was Saturday. Wilmot rang for a cup of coffee, and when Mrs. McGowan brought it, she had also a letter for him. It was from his mother. He drank his coffee, and then opened the letter.

"Dear Wilmot:" it ran. "We all miss you so much. I wish you had not taken up the notion to live so far away from home. It seems to me you might do as well here in Dadeville if you want a quiet place to write in. You were always so strange in your ways, that I could not understand you, but now that you are gone I seem to know you better, and then so many people seem to make it their business to go round and hint that you are doing no good up there. It looks like they would not let you alone and wait and see what you will do.

"You were always so good-natured that you kept down fusses when your father was out of temper, and since you left he seems more ill-humored than ever. He finds fault with everything and everybody.

"He is awfully restless, too. He seems to have some trouble on his mind, for he doesn't sleep soundly, and always seems suspicious that people in town are talking about his affairs. I am afraid he has gone too far in speculating in 'futures,' and doesn't want the Mill people to

discover it. He is always getting telegrams, and won't have them delivered at the store, for fear he will be found out. I wish you were here; I am afraid he will end by getting into serious trouble.

"The stock at the store is low, and he told me he was going to New York to buy more goods. If he comes, you must see him and try to influence him to stop speculation. If he were to lose his position, Laura and I would be destitute, for I know the shame of it all would ruin him."

Wilmot heard a step in the corridor, and the next instant Chester looked in, a doubtful smile on his face.

"Here is something for you," he said. "It was too large to get into the box, and the postman left it with some papers of mine. It doesn't look exactly right. It's too big to be tender—like a foot-ball player."

Wilmot opened the long envelope, and Chester looked out of the window.

"It's nothing but my story back from the *Decade*," said Wilmot gloomily.

Chester turned. "I was afraid it was that, although I thought it stood a chance. What did they say?"

"They honored me with only the printed form of declination."

"I wouldn't let it worry me," said Chester.

"The story may never have been read. Send it off again."

Just then Mrs. McGowan came to the door and paused hesitatingly. Thinking that she wanted to see Wilmot privately, Chester went out. He had just paid his own rent.

The landlady entered the room.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Burian," she said, "but my rent and gas bill is due, and this is the day I collect what is comin' to me all round."

Wilmot flushed. "I am sorry to say that I have not the money just now," he said, "but I am going out to try to dispose of some work and I shall try to hand it to you to-day."

"Very well, sir, I wouldn't bother you, but I have to pay my runnin' expenses."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE editorial rooms of the *Evening Fireside* were five floors above the malodorous warerooms of an ink factory near the Brooklyn Bridge. The elevator was used only for freight; the stairs were unlighted and narrow, and looked as if they had not been swept since they were built.

The boy who took Wilmot's card and disappeared somewhere behind the great stacks of dime novels, and bundles of story papers, returned in a few minutes with the information that Miss Underhill could be seen at her desk in the corner room on the right. Wilmot found her after a moment's search. She was a large young woman, with a rather intellectual head, blue eyes, and a frank, open countenance.

"I have the manuscript of a short story to submit for your examination," he said in reply to her upward glance and genial smile.

"We shall be glad of the opportunity," she replied, eying him with interest. "We have a good many contributors, who from long practice in our service, have learnt our peculiar needs in the way of fiction, but we are always reaching

out for new talent. When would you like to have our decision?"

"At once if it would not inconvenience you," replied Wilmot—"that is, if you pay on acceptance."

"We generally do so," replied Miss Underhill, scanning Wilmot's manuscript, as if calculating its length." Usually we are too busy to make hurried examinations, but I will make an exception in this case, and if you will wait half an hour, I can tell you if this is available, perhaps you would not mind looking over the files of the *Fireside* in the next room."

"I should be glad to do so," answered Wilmot.

Miss Underhill rang the call-bell on her desk, and the boy at the entrance came.

"Show Mr.—" (She glanced at the last page of the manuscript)—"Mr. Wrenshall into the library and get down the files of the last three volumes."

Wilmot shuddered at hearing for the first time the name he had assumed, but he did not disown it, and simply bowed and followed the boy into the adjoining room. The boy laid the ponderous tomes on a table, and left the room. Wilmot opened one but the sight of the crude draw-

ings, and the sensational double titles of the stories, sickened him.

"If I am ever guilty of doing this sort of thing it shall only be as a means to an end, and no one shall couple my name with it," he thought. "Charles Thornton Wrenshall sounds high enough. I hope she won't suspect that it is assumed."

Miss Underhill was a rapid reader, and before twenty minutes had passed she had summoned him to her presence. Wilmot wondered if her promptness in reaching a decision augured success or failure. He decided that it might as well mean one as the other when he saw the serious expression of her face as he drew near to her desk.

"You have done a remarkably fine piece of work, Mr. Wrenshall;" she said. "I like it very much indeed In fact, you have given me quite a treat, but what I am going to say may surprise you, and I hope you will never repeat it where it could reach the ears of the publishers for whom I work. I am going to be frank and tell you plainly that your story is simply too good—too high for the tastes of our readers. It is really such a story as one often sees in the *Decade*, the *Columbian*, *Hamilton's* and magazines of that

rank. What we have to publish is work that is decidedly more sensational, and not so literary in workmanship."

Wilmot bowed, and tried to give his smile the appearance of naturalness. For a moment Mrs. McGowan's rubicund face loomed before him.

"You are very kind indeed," he managed to say. "I did not, of course, know if it would suit."

"I have not the slightest doubt that you could do satisfactory work for us," said Miss Underhill, folding his. manuscript and placing it into its envelope—"that is, if you studied our plans and needs, and really desired to please our *clientèle*, but to be even more frank with you, I almost hope you will not try it, for I see you are capable of far better lines of work, and if one is really ambitious, this is more injurious than it seems at first."

"I think I understand you thoroughly," said Wilmot, recalling what Ellerton had said of Miss Underhill, "I did not intend to stick to it very long. The truth is, it is a bread and butter case."

"I understand, Mr. Wrenshall, but I still hope you won't—may I say—soil your hands with it. Have you tried other things?"

"Yes, in the way of editorial positions on papers, but so far I have not found an opening.

May I ask if there are any vacancies in this house?"

"None at present; there is never anything but manuscript reading to do, and that would be even worse for your style than writing our stories."

. . . . . .

As Wilmot descended the stairs, and emerged into the sunlight of the narrow street, which passed under one of the lowest arches of the approach to the great bridge, he was conscious of a deeper, more poignant despair than he had ever felt. The hum and stir of the city seemed to taunt him; the busy appearance of every person he passed, accentuated this feeling.

On his way towards Broadway, in passing through one of the streets which converged at the Five Points, he saw ahead of him a shop, in front of which hung three gilded balls. By the time he had reached the door, he had taken his gold watch from its chain. He hesitated a moment and then entered.

A bald-headed man of about middle age stood behind a showcase, resting his fat fingers on a velvet mat. Wilmot handed him the watch.

"How much can I get on that for a month?" he asked.

The pawnbroker looked at the outside of the watch, opened the case and examined the works under a magnifying glass fastened over his right eye. "Twenty-five dollars," he said, handing the watch back to its owner.

"I accept your offer," said Wilmot, "but there is a photograph pasted inside the case. Let me remove it."

The broker opened the case and held the picture to the light.

"Oh I can get that out all right," he said, applying the blade of his pen-knife to the circular picture. "Stop!" cried Wilmot fiercely, his eyes flashing. He was quivering all over.

"Why, what is the matter?" asked the man in astonishment. "I could have managed it easily." "I can do it better," said Wilmot. And when he had taken out the picture and was putting it into his notebook, he caught the expression of Muriel's eyes and his heart sank. He hoped she would never know he had removed the picture she had herself put into his watch that sunny day when they had gone nutting together. Ah, how near he had come to asking her then to be his wife!

The pawnbroker had returned, and was handing him some bills and a numbered ticket.

CHAPTER XIX.

WILMOT did not sleep well that night; thoughts about the uncertainty of his future kept him awake till almost day-break. He was roused from restless slumber by the post-man's whistle, and got up and hastily dressed, for he knew it was eight o'clock, and he was looking for a letter from Muriel in regard to her coming to New York. On the table below, he found two letters addressed to him, but neither was in her handwriting. One was from his father, and to his surprise it bore the New York postmark. He tore it open. It was as follows:

"My dear son: I got here this afternoon, and am sick, and in great trouble at this hotel. This will reach you early in the morning. For the love of Mercy, come down and see me. Your affectionate father, Jasper Burian."

The young man's blood seemed to stand still in his veins. His mother's fears in regard to her husband had doubtless come true. Surely nothing but an awful emergency could have driven Jasper Burian to such a humble, despondent appeal. Wilmot held the other letter unopened in his hand. He had no inclination to read it.

It might be an invitation to a reception, to a tea, tickets to some "first night" or recital, he cared not. He thrushed it unopened into his pocket and hurried towards Broadway to take a car down town.

King's Hotel was near the Battery. Its loftiest rooms looked over Castle Garden, and across the water to the Statue of Liberty, and out further seaward to where the horizon met the surface of the ocean. Wilmot entered the office and asked the clerk if Mr. Jasper Burian were staying there. The clerk looked at the register and nodded. Would the gentleman send up his name and take a seat?

Wilmot laid a card on the tray the office-boy held towards him, and sat down in the little reception-room. The time dragged slowly. Wilmot's impatience and fear grew as the minutes passed. Suddenly he remembered his other letter and opened it. To his astonishment, three five hundred dollar bills fell from it into his lap. The letter ran as follows:

"Mr. Wilmot Burian,

"Dear Sir:—

"I trust you will not be offended at the liberty I am taking. In a very indirect way, I have learned that you are a deserving young

man of great promise in the profession you have entered, and as I am led to believe you have only a limited income, and that you will put to a worthy use any money intrusted to you, I send you the enclosed bills. I shall not sign my name to this communication, so you need not try to return the money. That you may not feel hesitation in making use of it, I promise you that I will some day, when you are rich and famous, call on you and introduce myself. With best wishes for your prosperity, I am

"An Unknown Admirer."

Noticing that the bell-boys were regarding him curiously, Wilmot hastily restored the money and letter to his pocket. Something in the wording, and the assumed handwriting reminded him of Mrs. Sennett. The next instant he was sure she had sent the money, for he recalled a conversation with her about the publication of a volume of certain short stories of his. He remembered telling her that a publisher had offered to bring out such an edition in exquisite style for twelve hundred dollars.

"The gentleman wishes you to come up." It was the boy who had taken his card, and he pointed at the elevator.

At the door of a room on the top floor, Wilmot rapped. He had dismissed the thought of the money with the determination to return it to the sender that very day.

"Come in," a voice called out from within.

Jasper Burian was lying on the bed in his rumpled and soiled clothes; his hat had fallen from a table and lay beside his dusty boots on the floor. The old man sat up on the side of the bed, held out his hand sheepishly, and muttered some unintelligible words intended for a greeting. His face was haggard, his one eye red and swollen, his hair uncombed; he appeared ten years older than when Wilmot had last seen him.

"What is the matter, father?" asked Wilmot.

"I have been sick ever since I left Norfolk," said Jasper Burian. "I came by water. I wish it had killed me!"

"Father, I am very sorry to find you unwell."

"Wait till I tell you all," blurted out the old man. "I am not much sick. Wilmot, I am in awful trouble, and if you can't think of some way to help me out, our family name is gone. That's all there is about it."

"Help you, father? In what way do you mean?"

The old man sat up and began to look about the room for his boots. Wilmot brought them to him.

"Thank you, son." That slip into innate politeness reminded Wilmot of his childhood, when

he had often heard people say, Jasper Burian was a born gentleman. The old man made a quivering attempt to draw on one of the boots, and failing, threw himself back on the bed, and covered his face.

Wilmot sat down on the side of the bed. An awful curiosity to know the worst, like some material thing had laid hold of his heart and was crushing it. Through the window he caught a glimpse of the ocean, the moving ships, the ferry-boats, the sunshine on the white-capped water! How strange for the rest of the world to be moving in an orderly manner while all within him was turmoil—despair! When Jasper Burian next spoke, he did so without removing his hands from his face.

"My son," he groaned, "I am nothing but a common thief, and if something is not done to prevent exposure I shall kill myself! It shall never be said that I went to prison—a Burian never did."

Wilmot stared, speechless. Muriel Fairchild's image had a way of rising before him in the midst of great difficulties. He now saw her by turns in every gown he had ever seen her wear. But the picture that prevailed over all others—that stood between him and the man on

the bed, was her vision as she stood by his side on the veranda one day. They had been talking over the plot of a story he was planning.

"No," she had said, "I don't think it will do to have her marry the son of a thief. It would be incongruous—inartistic. It would leave a bad taste in one's mouth."

When Wilmot next spoke, it was with the vision still before him.

"How can I help you, father?" he asked. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Unless you can raise a good deal of money, you can't," answered the old man. "I am in an awful fix. I got to speculating, and it went against me. I tried to right myself by making a temporary use of some of the store funds, and pretending that certain unsettled bills for merchandise in New York were paid. They have been sending urgent letters about it, all of which I have prevented the President from seeing. I wrote to the New York merchants that I would be here to-day and settle. I am here but without a dollar to my name, and unless I make a big payment my arrest is certain. I thought there might be a ghost of a chance that some of your acquaintances up here might lend you some money, or go my security, or something!"

"Father," Wilmot's voice faltered, "I had to pawn my watch last night for money to pay my room rent. I have had a harder time than you may suspect; you know the publishers who first took my book failed. That delays my progress, and—"

A sudden groan from his father interrupted him.

"You could not raise the money," said he. "I might have known that. Writers never have a cent ahead. But I tell you I must have a thousand dollars or I'll kill myself. I am ready for it! I bought the stuff last night. I don't suppose you'd try to stop me!"

A great terror seized the heart of the young man. He tried to reflect calmly. Could Chester —Harrison—Mrs. Sennett? And with that he remembered the money she had anonymously sent him, and his heart began to beat wildly.

"Father!" he cried, "I can borrow the money you need; I have had that much loaned me—sent me for another purpose—to help me on with my work, but if you will take it and settle the debt, and promise to help me refund it when you get able, I'll let you have it."

Jasper Burian raised himself up, his one eye blearing incredulously.

"What?" he gasped.

Wilmot repeated his words, now more deliberately.

Hope began to kindle a fire in the breast of the old man, and its light flashed faintly across his sallow face. He stood up, made a step forward, and laid a trembling hand on Wilmot's shoulder. "My boy—" he began, but he choked and began to cry.

Wilmot loved him now as strongly as he had ever loved his mother, and that is saying much. It was only by a superhuman effort that he restrained his own tears. He drew from his pocket two of the five hundred dollar bills and laid them on the bed.

"Will a thousand dollars cover it, father?"

The old man nodded, in lieu of words, for he had choked again. He went awkwardly to the wash-stand, turned on the water and began to bathe his face. Wilmot knew he was trying to master his emotion, and said nothing. After a moment, which was passed in total silence, the ex-soldier turned and came forward, walking as erectly as his limp would permit.

"I want you to forgive me for all I have ever said against you and your writing," he said, keeping his glance from the money on the bed. "If

you had not come to New York and made friends, you never could have saved me. My boy, as sure as I live, you shall not lose by this. I have had an awful lesson. I'll settle with these people at once, and then—" he drew himself up to his full height and raised a quivering hand aloft, "I swear by all that's sacred to a Christian believer that never—never while breath is in this body, will I use any money but my own."

CHAPTER XX.

THAT afternoon at four o'clock Wilmot called on Mrs. Sennett. He found her at the door, taking leave of Mrs. Langdon.

"You have certainly ignored me completely," said the latter, touching him playfully with her fan. "If you were never in this part of town one might overlook it, but you visit the Galatin so frequently that even the hall porter knows your step in the corridor."

"Oh, I hope, for Mrs. Sennett's sake, that it is not so bad as that," retorted Wilmot.

Mrs. Sennett made a wry face as she closed the door after her departing caller.

"You ought not to have said exactly that," she laughed.

"Why?" he questioned.

"Because it was an open admission that you do come to see me. Dorothea was only pumping you. She cannot forgive anyone for liking me, and then you have not been to see her once since the day I met you there, have you?"

"I am sorry to say I have not."

"She'll never forgive it."

They had stopped at the low brass table

which held her tea-service. He took a letter from his pocket, and seeing it, her eyes went down. She began to fumble with the cups and saucers.

"Have you had tea?" she asked.

"No, but I have something to say to you."

She began to draw the table towards the lounge where he usually sat.

"Why don't you offer to do this for me?"

"Pardon me, I forgot," he laid the anonymous letter down, and lifted the table to the desired spot."

"I wonder if I have used all that Ceylon tea you fancied so much. Let me see if the cream has come."

She rang.

"You are not acting well to-day," he laughed, when the girl had received the order and gone out.

"Not behaving properly, you mean?"

"You are a poor actress," he said; "because no woman would fail to have the curiosity to want to know the contents of a letter which was put before her eyes, and which she had never seen before."

He liked her the better for the genuine flush of displeasure that spread over her face.

"Is—is this the letter?" she stammered, "the letter you think I ought to be curious about?"

"Not at all, for you know all about it. You sent it to me."

"Well, I shall not deny it, seeing that you are not angry with me," she said. "But do you know, I was afraid you'd be silly and not let me do anything for you."

He opened the letter, took out the remaining five hundred dollar bill, and laid it before her on the table.

"I have been compelled to accept the loan of part of it—of a thousand dollars. I never dreamt of keeping any of it, but this morning I met a dear friend of mine—a relative in fact—who was in great distress. The money saved him from absolute ruin. I shall always be grateful to you for that; but I never could have accepted any of it for my own use. I hope you will believe that."

An expression of vexation crossed her face.

"Then you will not arrange about the publication of the short stories?"

"You did not thoroughly understand me that day," he explained. "I did not say that I would pay for such an edition, even if I had been able. I only mentioned that I had had the offer. I shall never bring out any book till there is sufficient merit in my work to make a good publisher undertake it wholly at his own risk."

"And I thought I was going to help you; it really breaks my heart to find you so obstinate."

The maid came in with a tray, and after she had gone Mrs. Sennett proceeded in silence to prepare the tea.

"I almost feel that you are angry," he ventured to say after a moment. He felt very grateful towards her. Surely he was fortunate in having such a friend.

"I feel only disappointment," Mrs. Sennett replied. "I have more money than I have any use for, and if I can not help really deserving, promising people who are my friends, what is the use of trying to do good with one's money? And I'd rather help you than any one in the world."

To his surprise he saw tears in her eyes, and that touched him profoundly.

"You do not seem to realize how deeply I am in your debt already," he said, bending towards her. "Nothing on earth could have made me accept the loan of that thousand dollars except an emergency you could never dream of. Mrs. Sennett, I don't mind confiding in you. Your loan has saved my family name from everlasting disgrace. Just after opening your letter this morning I found my father on the verge of suicide because he had used certain funds of the people

by whom he was employed. Your money saved him, and I feel sure that he will never go wrong again."

Mrs. Sennett looked at him with glistening eyes.

"My poor boy! can this be true? Then—then the money did do you good after all."

"I'd rather use it as I did," answered Wilmot "than to have published a hundred books. I owe you far more than I can ever repay."

"The truth is, I am unhappy about something else," continued Mrs. Sennett. "Mrs. Langdon told me just now that people were making remarks about your visiting me so often, and—and when it occurred to me that perhaps I ought to stop it, for your sake, it almost broke my heart—it opened my eyes to a stern fact."

"And that is?" he asked, wonderingly.

"That I have become foolish about you—that you have become more essential to my happiness than I thought possible. I don't believe I could ever be happy again if—if you stopped coming."

His heart bounded, and then it sank like a plummet. Her meaning was too obvious to be misunderstood. For a moment there seemed to him nothing unnatural in what she had so broadly hinted at, and in that moment of tense emotion,

her suggestion only seemed to add to his vast consciousness of gratitude towards her.

"You feel that way, really?" he said.

Her face lighted up. Her eyes appeared to smile through her tears. Something in her face drew her to him. It all seemed a dream—or one of his most fanciful creations of the imagination.

"I should be the happiest woman in all the world to be able to help you materially, and—and if we have to part I really believe I shall never know another contented day. Oh, Wilmot, can you understand?"

The pathos of her tone, like an impalpable billow, suddenly overwhelmed him—completely wrecked his faculty for calm calculation and deliberation. He was conscious only of his gratitude, his faith in her, and her great friendship.

"Then we will get married," he said. "I shall devote my life—"

There was a rap on the folding-door, and Mrs. Langdon burst into the room.

"Pardon me," she said, coldly. "I don't mean to intrude on you turtle doves, but I forgot my note-book. I need it. It contains important notes for a write-up. I went all the way to the Twenty-third Street Elevated Station before I missed it. I am all out of breath. I'm sorry I disturbed you."

She secured her property from the depths of an easy chair.

Mrs. Sennett rose with great dignity. There could be no mistaking the sneer of the newspaper woman, nor the meaning in the term she had used.

"I really don't think you are quite polite, Mrs. Langdon," said Mrs. Sennett, coldly.

"I am sorry I intruded," said Mrs. Langdon ironically. "If I had reflected that you would not like to be disturbed, I—but it doesn't matter. I was in a great hurry, and didn't think."

"You are really too personal," said Mrs. Sennett. "I have heard a great many things you have said about my receiving Mr. Burian and it is time for you to stop. Mr. Burian has just asked me to be his wife."

"Indeed! You really can't be in earnest," Mrs. Langdon paused for an instant in bewilderment then she burst into a laugh, and laughed till the tears came into her eyes.

"We are in earnest," Mrs. Sennett assured her, "are we not Mr. Burian?"

Wilmot nodded. "We are," he said.

Mrs. Langdon ceased laughing for a moment and stared first at him and then at Mrs. Sennett.

"Mrs. Sennett," she began, subduing her

laugh to a little amused cackle. "I sincerely congratulate you. I shall never tease you again. Henceforth I shall have only the most profound respect for your ability. You are a smarter woman than your friends think you. You are smarter than you really look. I congratulate you with all my heart."

With that she flounced through the portieres and disappeared. Wilmot heard her laugh again as she passed through the next room, and that echo of her ridicule brought to him a sudden revulsion of feeling. What had he done?

"She is an envious old thing," declared Mrs. Sennett, sitting down by him and bending towards him with an air of sudden concern. The truth is, she took a fancy to you from the start and had quite set her heart on having you hang on to her as other young men have done. When you didn't visit her, she told me it was because you were too greatly absorbed with your work, but when she heard of your frequent visits to me, she began to make fun of me. You don't like her, do you dear?"

"I don't know her well," he answered, wondering what it was that had suddenly crushed all hope out of him.

Mrs. Sennett pushed the tea-table from her. She was plainly nervous.

"I dread only one thing," she said, "and that is her keen ridicule. I know her well enough to expect a whole tirade of gossip in announcing our engagement. She will be sure to put a lot of stuff in her paper to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" echoed Wilmot, with sinking heart, and now the image of Muriel Fairchild suddenly rose before him. The vision represented her as reading the notice in the *Advance* among her flowers on the lawn. Her face was white as death. Her father came in at the gate and spoke to her, but she only pointed to the article, dropped the paper, and turned into the house.

"Yes," resumed Mrs. Sennett, "I actually dread the next issue of her paper. I almost wish I had not shown my temper just now. She is a dangerous woman."

Half an hour later Wilmot took his leave. With a promise to call again soon, he hastened homeward.

"My God!" he said to himself, "what have I done?" And then the first tendency towards cowardice that had ever shown itself in his character came to him with the hope that, after all, there might yet be time to save himself and Muriel. He felt the thrill of her parting kiss.

He was a fool, an idiot; he had been untrue to the only one he loved more than he loved himself. He stopped on the sidewalk. He would go back and tell Mrs. Sennett to think it over, to consider nothing settled till—but Mrs. Langdon! There was no doubt that she had already written half of her announcement. It was too late! To retreat now would only compromise his friend and benefactress. Yes, Muriel Fairchild was lost to him. There remained nothing now to do except to cause the blow to fall as lightly on her as possible. The whole world would say he had sold himself.

CHAPTER XXI.

CHESTER stood at the door of Frank Harrison's room taking leave in an animated way. Wilmot nodded and was passing on to his apartment when Chester turned and called after him:

"Hello, I say, old man, where are you rushing so blindly?"

But Wilmot made no reply, and did not pause till he had entered his own room. He was about to close the door when he saw that Chester was following him.

"Let me in. I have a great deal to tell you," Chester said, eagerly. "Good news for you, too, I hope."

"Good news for me!" cried Wilmot, with a start. "Then she is here—Muriel—Miss Fairchild!"

"No, it's not so good as that; in fact you may kick me for taking a big liberty with you. You remember you told me the *Decade* had returned your story?"

"Yes."

"Well, I was talking to Harrison about it this morning, and he said he believed he could get

the editor of the *Columbian* interested in it. I came here to see you and found you out, but saw the story on the table. I knew it was meddling, but I took it to Harrison and he showed it to the *Columbian* staff. They liked it immensely and have accepted it. Here is their check for a hun dred and fifty."

Wilmot took the check. At any other time it would have set his pulse beating like a trip-hammer, but now he was scarcely conscious of the slightest gratification. However, he could not have failed to show appreciation for the kindness of his friends, had his troubles been even greater.

"I can think of nothing I should like more," he said. "I am greatly indebted to you. It was very kind of you both. You may go through my manuscripts whenever you like if you will treat them this way."

"I told Harrison I didn't see how you could object, really," said Chester, "and I am glad that is off my mind. The other news concerns myself."

"Yourself?" repeated Wilmot absently. He began to fumble among the articles on the mantlepiece for a match to light the gas, but gave it up and sat down on the side of his bed. The occurrence at the Galatin had crushed him com-

pletely—so completely that he felt absolutely weak. He loathed himself.

"Oh, Burian, old man," cried Chester. "I am the happiest human being ever born. A horrible world of my own creation has split wide open. My horizon has expanded and expanded till I see nothing but scintilating, palpitating ecstacy. I have been wildly in love with Aline ever since she came and lit up this old house and filled it with the perfume and song of heaven. But I have suffered tortures. I am, you know, twenty years older than she, and I brooded over that fact till marrying her seemed a crime. I was afraid it would be unfair for a man whose life is half spent to ask so young a girl to share the tail end of it with him. I thought she'd better take Harrison, and told myself that I'd never let her know the truth, but she found it out, and not an hour ago confessed she loved me, and that her father, dear old Weyland, had no objections to me as a son-in-law.

We are going to get married very soon, in an informal way in the studio. You are to be best man. It must be hasty. Brown, Wilkins & Co., of Boston, have offered me an editorial position at a living salary, and if I accept their offer, I must go over in a few days. Aline says she is willing

to forego a church wedding in order that we may not be parted. Weyland thinks it's best, under the circumstances. The dear fellow is really pleased, and—just think of it!—I have lain awake hundreds of nights thinking of his contempt when he found out that I dared to love his daughter. And now he is actually taking an interest in the arrangements."

"I congratulate you with all my heart," said Wilmot. "I confess I suspected you were in love, and I thought you were worried about something."

"This makes me want all of my friends to get married," laughed Chester. "You in particular, Burian. Pardon me, but I have long believed that you were in love with that little Southern girl. By Jove, you could not keep from loving her. She is the one woman in the world for you. She is as true as steel to those she likes. She has the highest ideals, and an ambition to be all that a noble woman can be, and above all, she loves you with all—"

"Stop, for God's sake, stop!" Wilmot sprang to his feet, and, pale as death, and quivering from head to foot, he stood in the faint light that came in at the window.

Chester looked at him in astonishment.

"What on earth is the matter?" he asked. "Are you ill?"

Wilmot sank back on his bed and was silent for a moment.

"What is the matter, old man?" repeated Chester, in growing alarm.

"I have something to confide to you," replied Wilmot, making an effort to speak calmly. "You must never again connect my name with that of—of Miss Fairchild. I am engaged to be married to Mrs. Sennett."

Chester started. For a moment he said nothing, and Wilmot could feel his eyes piercing him through the half darkness.

"I can not—simply will not, believe it," Chester said slowly and distinctly. "You have too much common sense to be another Printup."

"Another Printup?" repeated Wilmot. "I do not understand."

"Chester advanced a step and laid his hand on Wilmot's shoulder.

"Is it possible that you have never heard how the papers made sport of her two years ago for inducing that boy, Printup, nineteen years of age, to engage himself to her?"

"I know nothing of it. I—I can't believe it," stammered Wilmot.

"All you have to do then to convince yourself is to look over the files of the New York papers in the Astor Library during the month of April, two years ago. The Printups belong to the four hundred. They managed to stop the affair, after the couple had made three attempts to get someone to marry them, and they sent the boy to France. It was said that she had appealed to his boyish gratitude by advancing money to him when he was in a tight place. Burian, for God's sake, take the advice of a man who loves you like a brother, and don't let this go farther. She really is an attractive, magnetic sort of woman; she is good-hearted, and is no fool about some things, but she is awfully weak on the subject of loving men younger than herself! Break it up, my friend, or it will ruin you—absolutely end your career! You might as well never have been born as to take that step."

Wilmot covered his face with his hands.

"It is too late," he said, "the engagement was announced in the presence of Mrs. Langdon, and Mrs. Sennett says she will publish it in the morning."

"And you admitted it before Mrs. Langdon?"

"Yes, I admitted it," said Wilmot, rising and beginning to walk to and fro. "And you must

not say anything against her, Chester. She has been a good friend to me. I have gone into it, and I'll stand to my word—if—if—no matter what comes!"

"Bosh! getting that manuscript for you was nothing. Are you going to ruin your whole life because of a trifle like that?"

"I was not thinking of that, alone. I say, Chester, for God's sake, leave me now. I want to lie down and rest," and Wilmot threw himself back on the bed.

"All right, old man," said Chester slowly. "But I have nothing to take back. I would talk against it for a week if it would do a particle of good. For your own sake—for the sake of that sweet girl in the South stop it. Stop it, even if you are dishonored in the eyes of half the world!"

Chester's ringing footsteps died out in the corridor. Wilmot rose and began again to search for a match; the darkness maddened him; it seemed to close upon him, and press down on him like a vast, impalpable weight. When he had lighted the flaring gas, and saw his reflection in a mirror, he stared at it as if it were a specter. He had never looked so haggard. Something seemed to hold his eyes wide open, as if the muscles of his face had been shortened. There

was a glare in his eyes, which he tried to drive out; but it owed its being to remorse, and remained.

With a monosyllabic prayer he turned from the glass to the photograph of Muriel Fairchild on a little easel on the mantlepiece. He rested his hands on the edge of the mantlepiece, and as he gazed at the fair, beautiful face, the wild glare in his eyes softened into a beam of tender despair. How he loved her! And he had never fully realized it till now, when she was lost to him forever. She would weep for him as for a friend that had died. Tears sprang into his eyes at the thought. He felt a choking sensation in his throat. He called himself a coward—her murderer. He told himself that he was too despicable to live. Then he heard someone coming along the corridor from the direction of Chester's room, and springing to the door, he grasped the handle, and firmly turned the key. Chester should not face him again with his galling advice! What had been done was irrevocable. The steps were now very near, and Wilmot would not release the handle of the door lest it rattle, and betray his presence at it: so he held it firm, and waited. Chester would rap, and getting no answer, would perhaps move on.

The rap came, a gentle considerate one. Wilmot held his breath, clutched the door-handle, and waited. Another rap, and it was louder; still he kept silent. Then Chester caught the door-handle and shook it violently.

"Burian," he called out sharply, "I say old man, are you there?"

Wilmot made no response.

"Burian! I say Burian!" Chester's voice was keyed high.

"What is the matter?" It was now Frank Harrison, who was speaking, and Wilmot heard his approaching steps.

"I really don't know." There was no mistaking the note of alarm in Chester's voice. "I —I am afraid something has happened to Burian. I saw him just now, and—great God; if—"

Chester shook the door again, and threw his weight against it. Then Wilmot turned the key, and the door opened. Chester almost fell into the room.

"What is the matter?" asked Wilmot.

"I beg pardon," gasped Chester; "I thought —I was afraid—by Jove! you gave me a devilish fright!" Chester looked at Frank Harrison, who stood staring in the corridor, and affected a laugh. "I left my match case in your room just

now," he said; "and when I rapped and you made no sign, I thought—I was afraid you had fainted, you looked so ill just now."

"I am all right," replied Wilmot, who understood what his friend had feared. "I am only a little tired. Won't you both come in?"

"No, thanks," replied Harrison. "I am dressing for the theatre, and am behind time. I have a first-night ticket to see Mansfield in a new play."

Chester went into the room and secured his match-box.

"Think I feel like feeding," he said as he went out. "Won't you come along?"

"No, thank you," answered Wilmot. "I think I'll lie down and rest."

But before he went to sleep that night he took Muriel's photograph from the mantlepiece and laid it in a drawer under some papers. He could not bear the gentle stare of her condemning eyes. He had blindly, stupidly forsaken her.

CHAPTER XXII.

MEET Madame Angier and me in Jersey City at six forty this evening.

"Muriel."

That was the telegram Mrs. McGowan handed Wilmot the next morning as he and Chester were going down to breakfast together.

"What is it?" asked Chester, as they went along the street.

"Miss Fairchild is coming to New York to-night," replied Wilmot.

"Ah!" and Chester fixed Wilmot's face with a sudden, sharp look. "I am glad she is coming."

"She wants me to meet her and Madame Angier at the station in Jersey City."

"And you are going?"

"Yes, of course."

They entered the café, and took seats at a little window on the side of the room. Chester gave the waiter a coin and ordered a copy of the *Morning Advance*, his eyes meeting Wilmot's as he did so. The glances thus exchanged were gloomily significant. When the paper came Chester opened it before his eyes. Wilmot ordered his breakfast and began to stir his coffee and cream

which the waiter had already brought. He could not keep his eyes from Chester's profile.

Presently Chester grunted angrily, and struck the table with his hand.

"It is all here," he said, without looking up. "That woman is a she devil! I can read rankling spite in every damnable line she has written."

Wilmot reached out for the paper, but Chester crushed it into his lap.

"I wouldn't read it if I were you," he said. "It is the most cowardly piece of work I ever saw. She is a disgrace to the profession. If a man had done it I'd thrash the life out of him, but you can't take any notice of it. You must simply grin and bear it."

Wilmot's hand lay extended on the table. It seemed to have stiffened till it looked like a plaster cast. A newsboy crossed the sidewalk and was holding up his papers, soliciting him to buy through the open window. But Wilmot turned to Chester.

"I may as well see what she says, and be done with it," he said, in the tone of a man condemned to death.

Chester gave him the paper, and took up the *menu*.

"Dorothea has evidently taken a dislike to you," he said.

Wilmot's face was hidden behind the open paper. When he folded it, and laid it down a few moments later, his face was white, set and distorted. After that colloquy, the two friends did not speak till their breakfast was finished. Chester seemed to have decided not to refer again to the painful topic.

As they were parting on the street corner, however, he said, holding out his hand:—

"I hardly feel that I have the right to my own happiness while you are feeling as you do."

"Don't think about me, Louis," said Wilmot. "I shall go back and try to get to work on something. The check you and Harrison brought me has stimulated me to make further effort."

That afternoon as Wilmot was walking down Broadway, on his way to meet Muriel and was looking for a car to one of the Jersey City ferries he met Richard Soul as he was coming out of a little book shop, accompanied by a young lady who resembled the manager closely enough to be his daughter. Wilmot was quite sure that Mr. Soul looked directly at him, and yet the manager made no sign of recognition, but took the girl's arm, and drew her onward. The next minute Wilmot had no doubts about the matter, for the girl turned and cast a curious glance over her

shoulder after him. It seemed as if the manager had told her who he was.

Wilmot knew that he had been cut. Soul had read Mrs. Langdon's article, and had refused to speak to him. The long street seemed to rise and fall; Wilmot moved onward as through a haze, jostled by the hurrying passers-by. To him his condition seemed infinitely pathetic. He had acted with unpardonable haste, but he had done no intentional wrong.

He ground his teeth together and clenched his hands. A Burian, it was true, would not go to prison, nor to the unblessed grave of a suicide, but a Burian, who had dreamt of writing the name higher on the cliffs of honor than it had ever been written, had become the butt of public ridicule. His name was being connected with that of a silly boy of nineteen—a fool! And coupled with that was the stinging—secret—fact that a Burian had blighted the life of a bright young girl.

A car with a green stripe flashed through the blur before his eyes and the letters, "TWENTY-THIRD STREET FERRY," reminded him of his duty. But after all, he reflected. Would it now be wise for him to meet Muriel? Had he really the social right to act as the escort of a

young woman who had always been punctilious in regard to the standing of her acquaintances?

The thought like some material thing seemed to strike him between the eyes. He had crossed the street to catch the car, but fell back and allowed it to pass on. He told himself that he must think the matter over, and not act injudiciously in an affair of such grave moment. But he could not think. The effort to decide between right and wrong in the present instance set his brain whirling.

The final result of his deliberation was the decision that he would, on the boat coming over, apprise Muriel and her chaperon of what had happened. Then if they objected to his company he would see that they secured a reliable cab on the New York side, and leave them.

Behind the iron railing which separates the waiting-room of the big station in Jersey City from the numerous in-coming and out-going trains Wilmot waited. One of the guards had directed him to the track of the Limited Express from the South, and on it his dull gaze rested. There was a far-off rumble, as of an earthquake, then the flare of a headlight loomed up from the dusk beyond the long train-shed.

"She is coming!" said his soul. "She is

coming—coming, with a heart full of trust and tenderness, yet I—Oh, My God!"

The locomotive stood noisily exhausting steam within a few feet of him. He pressed his face between the bars of the fence, and strained his eyes to see the well-remembered form among the stream of passengers who were alighting from the long line of cars, and rushing pell-mell through the gates. Wilmot tried to pass inside, but a guard held him back.

"You must not go in there!" said he gruffly.

Wilmot ascended the steps leading to the waiting-room, that he might look over the heads of the crowd. He was afraid Muriel might pass him unnoticed in the human torrent.

"Ah, here he is!" It was her voice, ringing with a glad tone of relief. She stood before him, dropped her parcels, and held out both her hands.

"I expected you to be down where the train stopped," she said, as gladly as a happy child; "and when I did not see you I was afraid something had detained you, but I forget; you do not know Madame Angier."

"I am very glad to meet you," said that lady who looked as if she had not caught his name.

Wilmot relieved them of their hand-bags and

parcels, and began to pilot them towards the ferry.

"Have you had a pleasant trip?" he managed to ask.

"Rather," answered Madame Angier; "except for the dust. It has not rained for a long time."

They had reached the ferry-boat and taken seats, when Muriel, who had been silently and studiously regarding Wilmot during his conversation with Madame Angier, inquired:

"You do not look very well, Wilmot, have you been ill?"

"No, I think I am all right," he returned awkwardly.

There was a pause for a moment. A troubled, unsatisfied expression had settled on Muriel's face: the joyous note in her voice had died out.

"We are going to the Galatin," explained Madame Angier. "A letter from the proprietor, who is a friend of mine, made me decide on it just before I left Atlanta. He has offered us delightful rooms there. He seems desirous of having me hold some of my recitals in the music-room. I hope you won't think I quite approve of the house. There are several objectionable people there, who, but for their wealth and influence, would have been turned out long ago. I

have always been particular about my environment and when I have a charge like this (she glanced at Muriel lovingly), "I am even more careful. I see from this morning's *Advance*, which I read on the train, that one of the inmates of the house, Mrs. Sennett, is making herself ridiculous again by becoming engaged to another young man. I did not show the article to you, dear," turning to Muriel. "I want to keep such things from you as much as possible. You won't have to meet her."

"Why, that is the name of your friend, Wilmot," said Muriel, wonderingly.

"Do you know her?" asked Madame Angier. "Do you know Mrs. Albert Sennett?"

Wilmot nodded. His head rocked mechanically, and came to a stop only in obedience to the law of gravitation. The dull, shuddering thump of the machinery in the hold of the boat seemed in some subtle way to connect itself with his vital organism. That he must then and there explain was clearly unavoidable. His muscles tightened as he looked at Muriel. He was about to thrust a rusty blade into the heart of the timid creature that he loved beyond all else in the world.

"I feel," he began, "that I have a—a disagreeable duty to perform before offering myself as

your escort. I am the young man referred to in the article you mention."

"You!" exclaimed Madame Angier, "surely—"

Something again set his head rocking.

"We became engaged yesterday afternoon." He avoided the hardening stare that shot from Muriel's eyes. He saw Madame Angier suddenly sit erect, and heard her utter a low, unintelligible exclamation. Muriel's purse rolled from her lap to the floor. He stooped and restored it. Her lips moved as they would have moved had the words "thank you" come from them. From her deep, long-lashed eyes a startled, terrified question was springing. He quailed before her stare like an insect beneath focused sun rays. The boat began to bump against the pier on the New York side. He took up their bags and parcels.

"I shall see that you get a reliable cab," he said significantly to Madame Angier.

"It would make no difference to me—myself," stammered that lady, flushing deeply, but you know the world well enough to understand—oh! I hate unpleasant situations. I do hope you comprehend, Mr.—Mr.—"

"You are entirely right," he assured her, as the crowd pressed them towards the gates at the end of the boat. "It will be best."

Muriel had not heard the foregoing dialogue, having gleaned only what he said about the cab. She was conscious, however, that something as awful as death itself had befallen the man she loved. What an ending to a day more full of bright anticipation than any her life had ever brought forth!

He hailed a cab, and when he had seen them safely inside, and had given the driver explicit instructions as to their destination, he stood with his head uncovered in an attitude of utter dejection. Madame Angier, without offering him her hand, coldly thanked him for the service he had rendered them. Muriel shook hands with him, that dumb, helpless inquiry still in her eyes. He signaled to the driver and the cab rolled away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THAT night Wilmot slept the deep dreamless sleep of a beast driven to exhaustion, and yet when he awaked the next morning he was unrefreshed.

As he lay with his gaze on the ceiling, he heard Chester merrily whistling in his room, and the thought came to him that it was remarkable that he and Chester had so quickly changed places. Only a few days ago the latter had been deeply troubled, and now—what a gleeful whistle! It was as if Chester had become a boy again. After all, manhood was such a grim sordid thing! Wilmot shuddered. He was to succeed Mr. Albert W. Sennett, who had died in ripe old age. Wilmot's boyhood had seemed to remain with him faithfully up to now, but it had suddenly deserted him. He felt old, and old in wrong doing.

He hoped Chester would not stop with his cheerful face as he went out to breakfast. There seemed more ease in yielding to morbid brooding than in fighting it, and Chester's whistle was so incongruous, so irritating.

It was louder now, for Chester had opened

his door, and was coming out. Then the whistle ceased, and Wilmot knew that his friend was stepping lightly to avoid disturbing him. He heard him descend the stairs, and then, after a few minutes, Chester returned. His footsteps slowed up and stopped. There was a rustling of paper and a letter was cautiously pushed under the door.

As Chester stole away, Wilmot picked it up. It was from Muriel. It had been posted at 9 o'clock the previous night.

"Dear Wilmot:" she wrote. "I feel that I must make an explanation. It was not till we were driving on to the Galatin last evening that I learned why you did not accompany us all the way. If I had dreamt that Madame was suggesting such a thing to you—my oldest and best friend—I should have opposed it indignantly. For the world, I would not have you feel that I could be ashamed to be seen in your company under any circumstances. Do come to see me at once, and allow me to explain. I feel so homesick up here among strangers. Let me be your friend as of old! Do let me, even if what I heard you say is true. Your action must have been right else you—in whom I have so much faith—would not have done it. Muriel."

Wilmot sat with the letter in his hand for a long time before deciding how to answer it. Finally he wrote as follows :

"My dear little friend:

"In such an important matter as this I can not allow you to act on the generous impulses of your great big heart. Madame Angier was right; you ought not to be seen with me now. The lady who is to be my wife evidently has enemies, and they are not now favorably disposed towards me. It would kill me to be the means of drawing you into notice in connection with a name so notorious as mine has become. For your own sake don't even say up here that you know me, but think as well of me as you can. What I have done seemed to me to be right.

"Faithfully your friend,

"Wilmot Burian."

The note did not express what he wanted to say, but he had put it beyond his power to write what was really in his heart. He sent it by a messenger.

That afternoon about three o'clock, as he was endeavoring to work on a short story, the plot of which had once held great attraction for him, but which now seemed unmanageable, a servant brought up Muriel's card, with the information that she was waiting in the parlor below.

She was sitting on the sofa at the window which opened on the court where there was a little plot of grass, a diminutive fountain, and a few pots of Mrs. McGowan's half-famished flowers.

"You ought not to have come," he said gently, as he took her hands and pressed them excitedly.

The next instant he saw the mistake into which his tender impulse had led him. She drew herself up and gave him her frank eyes steadily.

"I would not have you misunderstand me, Wilmot," she said proudly. "You know me well enough to know that I am not here to plead for myself. What has—" her voice quivered against her will—"passed between us is over, and, of course, must be forgotten by us, but—"

"Oh, Muriel, don't!" was all he could say.

"As for my calling here," she went on firmly, "Mr. Chester was with me when your message came. I told him I desired to see you, and he said there would be no harm in my coming—that the parlor belonged to the landlady, and that ladies often come here. I felt it my duty to see you, Wilmot. I should feel the same way if it were my brother or any dear friend who was going to do a rash, thoughtless thing, which would imperil all his future. I saw her last night in the dining-room. A woman can read a woman, Wilmot, and, you see, I know you, too. I understand your nature. Pardon me, but I could swear you do not love her. I was forced to search for

the cause of your step. Of course, you felt grateful to her for her rescuing your novel, but that was not all, Wilmot."

"Not all?" he repeated with a start.

"No, it was not all, Wilmot. You know your father and I have always been good friends."

He nodded, wondering what could be coming.

"When he returned from New York the other day," went on Muriel, "he met me on the street, and walked home with me. He could talk of nothing but you—your nobleness—your bravery as a boy—his great pride in you. He knew he could trust me and he told me all about his recent mistakes and your timely rescue. He cried like a child. He said some new friend had advanced money to you, and with it you had saved him. I can see it all, Wilmot. Mrs. Sennett is that friend, and you felt so grateful that you impulsively—Oh, Wilmot! it would be like some women to use a thing like that to gain a purpose—they say she did it once. And it would be like you—in a moment of great gratitude to yield, and—"

"Please don't, Muriel!" he cried almost with a sob. "Don't you see I cannot bear more. My honor binds me not to be as frank with you as I should like."

"I have not told you the real object of my visit yet," the girl said with white lips. "I have money in my own name, Wilmot. I want to advance it to you. You feel that you owe her a debt and—"

"It is not a question of money, now, Muriel. You are an angel to offer it, but I tell you I am honor bound to stand to her as her future husband, let the future be what it may, but I have lost the opportunity of proving myself worthy of you, and I shall hate myself to the last hour of my life." "Is it really too late?" asked the girl, and she stood up quivering from head to foot. "I mean too late to undo what has been done?"

"Yes, it is too late; the papers have heaped ridicule on her as it is, and more would be said if the engagement were broken. I must stand by her, Muriel!" She moved to the door and opened it. "Then I can do nothing, after all," she faltered, white to the lips.

"Nothing now, Muriel. The die has been cast." He saw her start to put out her hand, but her eyes filled, and to hide her emotion, she turned away quickly. He stood in the doorway and saw her go out into the busy street.

"My God! it's over!" he cried, going back into the room and closing the door. "It's over!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

TWO days later Chester invited Wilmot to take five-o'clock tea with him at the Palace Hotel.

"It is quite a spacious affair," said he, "and it is jolly to drop into the big tea-room about this time of day and listen to the music and watch the swells come and go. It seems to be the general meeting-place of the ultra fashionable."

The tea-room was a big circular space in the centre of the hotel. It was roofed with glass and decorated with palms and flowers. A Hungarian orchestra in native costumes, played in a balcony overhead. At the numerous round tables were seated men in business dress and ladies in street attire. Fans revolved overhead and a fountain threw its spray almost to the apex of the tent-shaped roof.

It was delightfully cool and pleasant. As they sat down the two men had the entire room before their eyes. Through doors opening in all directions they could look down long corridors which were seemingly endless vistas of plants, statues in niches, and tall gold-framed mirrors.

Chester ordered a pot of chocolate with whipped cream and cakes.

"I don't see a soul that I know," he said to Wilmot, "but it is not always so. Many friends of mine drop in here in the afternoon. I always feel somehow that I'm quite in the procession when I come here in this frock suit. People don't know but that I am a Western cattle king. Sometimes they look at me as if they were wondering who I am, and even that is pleasanter than having them know. There are so many grades of society. That young lady in the exquisite organdie on our right would think we had plebeian taste if she noticed our chocolate and cakes. She ordered that pink ice because it harmonizes with her gown. Who knows? She may have borrowed her clothes, or bought them second-hand. Life is as delicately graduated from hardship to luxury as a stalk of asparagus from leathery butt to juicy tip. But what luck have you had in the last few days, old man?"

"Nothing but continual disappointments," answered Wilmot. "They pile up on me."

"Another rejection?" guessed Chester.

"Worse than that."

"What can be worse to an author?"

"King and Burton are going to delay the publication of my book."

"For what reason?"

"They gave none; their communication was extremely vague."

Chester gazed at Wilmot steadily. He was silent for several minutes, then he brought his fist down on the table firmly.

"As a friend I must talk plainly to you," he said. "You have more right to know the true situation than anyone else."

"What do you mean?"

Chester cleared his throat and crossed his legs under the table.

"You know perhaps that old Burton is a very cranky fellow, and that both members of the firm are old-fashioned—genuine out-of-date old fogies."

"I have been told so."

"Harrison seems to have heard something relative to your book from his friend, Lester. To make a long story short, he says the reports about your engagement in the papers infuriated the firm to such a degree that they positively ordered Soul to return the manuscript to you. It seems, however, that Soul made them understand that if they returned the manuscript after having signed the contract, you might recover damages. Harrison is not positive, but he thinks, as they made no agreement as to the date of publication, that their intentions are simply to tire out your patience by repeated delays."

Wilmot was looking down the long corridor in front of him. Not a muscle of his face had moved.

"I am not wholly unprepared for it," he said; "Soul refused to speak to me the other day on the street. The truth is, I am not unprepared for anything. I am glad you told me, however. It is well to know what to count on."

When Wilmot parted with Chester a few minutes later he went to call on Mrs. Sennett. Her apartments were filled with the delightful fragrance of fresh violets, and she met him with a welcoming smile.

"Oh you truant, you tardy man!" she cried. "Where have you been?"

She took his hand in one of hers, and laid the other playfully on his arm. Had he been a moral coward, he would have begged for his release, less a gentleman, he would have torn his arm from her clasp. He allowed her to lead him into the salon, and arrange the pillows on the lounge for him to sit down.

"You do not look well," she went on gently. "Too much work or worry, I am sure?"

He nodded, but said nothing.

"I have a delicate matter to speak to you about," continued Mrs. Sennett, sitting down

beside him and interlacing her fingers. "Oh, no!" she ejaculated suddenly. "It is not about those horrid newspaper articles. I know they must have annoyed you considerably, but as an author who is constantly before the public, you'll soon get accustomed to that sort of thing. It is the penalty of genius. Mrs Langdon was saying only this morning that it would, after all, give your book a boom. She says it makes little difference what the sensation is, so that it brings the author's name prominently before the public. But—but what are you looking at me like that for?"

"Have you," he asked, "have you been talking to that woman?"

Mrs. Sennett laughed.

"Oh, I see, you thought I'd snub her! No, I wouldn't gratify her to that extent, besides, the notice was—oh, so much milder than I thought it would be! The editor must have blue-penciled it. He was afraid he'd be sued for slander. No, I treat her as if nothing had happened. It would not do to act otherwise. She is a dangerous woman—a dangerous one, or a good one, just as she feels disposed. She borrowed my carriage and horses this morning to drive an English club-woman about town. I hadn't the heart to refuse

her. She knows how to get round one. She is going to give your book a catchy review, she says. She asked me yesterday when it would be out. I could not tell her, and as you were not here, I telegraphed King and Burton, and incidentally mentioned that I wanted 500 copies. They answered that nothing had been decided on as to the date of publication. I thought you said—"

He sprang to his feet, and stood before her quite red in the face, a quivering hand resting on the table.

"I am sorry you did that," he said. "You ought not to have applied to them."

"But why, pray? They don't get many orders—cash orders like mine. Indeed, I thought it would make them realize your importance."

Had she been a man he would have cursed her for stupidity. As it was, a certain solicitous expression in her eyes reminded him of his mother. After all, she had been his friend in a time of great need. He sat down.

"They have delayed the publication of my book," he explained, determining not to reveal the whole truth," and I thought that a request like yours might vex them a little that is all."

"Oh, I'm sure you are mistaken," she said.

"But here is what I wanted to see you about. It is a question of money. It is strange, but that seems always our topic of conversation. I may as well come to the point and be done with it, and you—you silly, sensitive man—must be reasonable. I have more money than I can use, and you are having an awfully hard time of it. You will have some expense in preparing for our wedding and—well, the truth is, I want to lend you some money."

She saw him draw himself up and thrust his hand into the pocket of his coat. He drew out an envelope upon which she saw her name.

"You are very kind," he said, "but I could never think of taking another cent from you. On the contrary, I am ready to make a small payment on that other loan. It is not much, but I am glad to be able to pay something."

"Mr. Burian—Wilmot, don't be ridiculous!" cried Mrs. Sennett, impatiently throwing the envelope into his lap. "You must be sensible! I—I really don't know what to do with you; we simply can't go on like this. With all my money, it would be foolish for me to continue giving it right and left, as I often do, to strangers, when the man who is to marry me needs the actual comforts of life. You see how absurd it is."

"Then we shall have to part," said Wilmot firmly.

"You mean to break the engagement?"

"It seems that you are about to do it."

"I meant nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Sennett, catching a deep breath. "I could never give you up now. I have come to look upon you as my future husband. I could never face the ridicule of the public. They would be sure to say that the notices in the papers had turned you against me."

"We'll say nothing more about it, then," Wilmot remarked, wearily. He laid the envelope on the table. "But you must not refuse this. If you do we shall certainly quarrel."

"Have your own way, then," she laughed. "After all, you are paying me a high compliment. If the public only understood you, they'd never charge you with marrying for money."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE evening appointed for Louis Chester's marriage arrived. Burian was with him in his room as he was putting the finishing touches on his toilet.

"I never saw you look so well," remarked Wilmot. "How do you feel?"

"Tip-top," laughed Chester. "I never felt better in my life. It is going to be the making of me, Burian. The only thing that is bothering me now is that I must wait half an hour before she is mine. Now I am dressed, I don't know how to pass the time. I wonder if I couldn't write a salable joke."

"Who is to be here?" asked Wilmot.

Chester was for the fortieth time adjusting his necktie. He seemed to hesitate before answering, then he said:

"Not many. You see, as we couldn't have a crowd, we thought the fewer there were present the fewer would be offended by being left out. Weyland will be on hand, of course. Harrison, blast his picture, has sneaked off. He is awfully upset, and I don't blame him a bit. He hoped all along that she would finally throw me over. He actually turned white when I told him."

"Any ladies coming?" questioned Wilmot.

"Only Mrs. Drule and her daughter, and Dorothea begged so hard to get in to give us a send-off that I couldn't refuse. When she sees the bride's dress she'll be inspired."

"Is that all the ladies?" persisted the questioner.

"All?" hesitatingly, "yes, old man, that's all. Now run to the studio and hurry them. The Rev. Mr. Blake went up some time ago. Go entertain him. Dorothea will strike us at the last minute, pencil and pad in hand, a messenger boy at her heels. I'll like her write-up if she'll only do justice to the bride, and not make me out too old."

Wilmot found the minister sitting bolt upright in a corner, his hands folded in front of him. Wilmot introduced himself, and gave him a few directions about the entry of the bridal party, and where they were to stand.

Weyland came in and blustered about arranging curtains, screens, flowers and hangings.

"We are going to lose her, Burian," he sighed. "The Lord only knows how I shall get along, but I'll follow them to Boston before long. Louis has simply got to adopt a father-in-law."

Mrs. Drule, a large florid woman, and her daughter, a tall old maid, came in and shook

hands with Weyland. He introduced them to the two gentlemen as old friends of his and Aline's. Then something happened which caused Wilmot's heart to stop beating for an instant. A maid came in from Aline's room, leaving the door open for an instant, and he caught sight of the bride in a gray tailor-made gown before a pier-glass, and standing by her was Muriel Fairchild. At that instant Muriel noticed the open door and went to close it. As she did so her eyes met Wilmot's, and she flushed a little and bowed. The door shut her from his view, but it was only for a moment, for she came into the studio.

"Miss Weyland wishes you," she said to the maid, and she advanced to Wilmot, her hand extended. There was a rigidness almost of fear about her lips.

"You did not know I was here," she said significantly, half reproachfully.

"I had no idea of it," as he caught her warm, pulsing hand in his.

"Mr. Chester sent a carriage for me," she explained. "He avoided telling you I was coming. He did not want to cause his best man to desert him at the last moment."

"Don't be hard on me, Muriel," Wilmot whispered.

"Well, you have persistently avoided me on all other occasions I am sure. But I am glad I came, even if you are ashamed to meet me, for Aline is the dearest little woman I ever knew. I fell in love with her as soon as Mr. Chester introduced us. He told me not a single girl near her own age would be here, so I came early to help her with my valuable suggestions."

"You couldn't do otherwise, with that big heart of yours." His eyes met hers with a glance that told her more than his words.

"I really wanted to meet you, too, particularly," said Muriel, and now her face hardened and lost a little of its color. "The truth is, I have a message for you."

"For me?"

"Yes; your father has written to me about you."

"About me?"

"Yes; you must not blame him." Muriel moved to a window that looked down into the street. He saw that she wanted to speak to him before the others came, for she spoke hurriedly. "No, you mustn't blame him, for he is deeply troubled about you."

"I don't quite understand," said Wilmot, perplexed. "I really do not."

"It is very hard for me to bring up a certain disagreeable subject again, Wilmot," twisting her white fingers together. "But I must, for he has implored me to do so. You know it is natural for him to think you and I meet frequently, as we did at home."

"I know," said Wilmot; "go on please."

"He has read the announcement of your engagement," said Muriel. "It was copied at length in the home paper. There are, naturally, many comments down there and he is troubled about the lady being—being older than you, and, as she is rich, he is afraid his recent trouble had something to do with bringing it about. He implored me to see you (I got his letter this morning) and beg you to take no step without fully considering it in every way."

"He suspects—" The words Wilmot had framed in his mind died away into nothingness.

"Yes, that is it," said Muriel.

Wilmot tried to speak, but he could not. There was almost an appeal for mercy in the tender, worshipful glance he gave her. His hand quivered as he caught the window curtain, drew it aside, and looked out into the gathering night.

The tones of a street piano came up mellowed by the height and the city's monotone. A group

of little girls was dancing on the pavement under the glare of the electric light. They were whirling in pairs, throwing out their feet in joyous unison. He heard a loud laugh from the spectators. A man was trying to mount a bicycle and had fallen. The world down there seemed so light-hearted, while he was—"

"Forgive me," broke in Muriel. "I see I have hurt your feelings."

She turned to Weyland, who was approaching, and greeted him with a smile.

"How was she, Miss Fairchild?" he asked.

"The prettiest bride I ever saw, Mr. Weyland. You have reason to be proud of her."

The door bell rang and Weyland bent forward to see who was coming.

"It's Mrs. Langdon," he said. "We were to wait for her. Now, Burian, run down stairs and bring up your end of the business. I'll see to the bride."

With a smile Muriel bowed to Wilmot as he withdrew.

At the door he met Mrs. Langdon.

"How do you do, Mr. Burian," she said sheepishly, as she raised her hand and gave it a downward crook before his eyes.

"I am quite well I thank you," said Wilmot,

coldly. He held her hand for an insant; then went on down to Chester's rooms.

"By Jove, I thought you never would come. What kept you so long? Oh, I know; it was Miss Fairchild.

Chester stood before the glass and gave another tug at his necktie.

"You must forgive me, old man," he added. "I wanted her to know Aline, and then—well, to be frank, I hoped that if I brought you two together at a wedding, something might come of it—something that would do away with the one glaring blunder of your life, and make you, eventually, as happy as I am. Think it over, Burian! I love you too well—but you know how I feel about it. Go ahead. Lead me to my queen."

As the two young men stood in the corridor at the door of the studio, they saw Mrs. Drule seated at the piano, looking first into Aline's room and then back at them.

The minister with a conscious air of dignity stood under the chandelier which was profusely hung with roses.

"Get ready," cried Mrs. Drule, "and when I have played a bar or so come in. Be sure to keep step." She evidently got a signal from Weyland at the door of his daughter's room, for she

began to play a wedding march, and then nodded to them to come in.

As they entered, Weyland, his daughter on his arm, advanced to meet them. Then the best man and the father stepped aside and the couple stood before the minister, their heads bowed.

Dorothea, pencil in hand, was leaning over a piece of paper lying before her on the top of the piano. There was a wistful, far-away expression in her eyes as they rested on the bride that made her look more youthful. It was as if she were recalling some unsullied period in her life before she had drifted to the shore of Bohemia. Weyland's eyes were moist. Chester swept the assembled group with one exultant glance and then looked down.

The flowers hanging from the chandelier, cast a shadow over the young bride. The minister coughed, and glanced at Dorothea. It was as if he were wondering if her satirical pen would spare his awkwardness. If she made sport of anything, he thought, it would he his over-abundance of flesh of which he was day by day growing more sensitive. He decided that her attack would be on that line, seeing that she was a thin woman.

Silence fell on the room. All sound was now on the outside of the building. The street piano

had moved a few doors further on and its notes were softer. The tune was "Marguerite."

The short ceremony occupied only a minute. Weyland stepped forward and kissed his daughter, while her head rested on his massive shoulder and then he shook hands with Chester.

"She's a fine girl, Louis," was all he said. "She'll make you a good wife."

Then everyone came forward and congratulated the smiling couple.

As Wilmot clasped his friend's hand and offered his best wishes, Chester simply said:

"Go and do the same thing yourself, Burian. *Do* it, I tell you. You and I happen to know the only two girls in the universe any way."

Wilmot made no reply. He gave his place to James Fitch Ellerton, who had just arrived in his business suit and stood offering congratulations and apologies for his appearance all in the same breath.

"Couldn't stay down stairs after Mrs. McGowan told me what was going on and that you would take the train in a few minutes. I got Weyland's note only a minute ago and had no time to dress. I hope I'll do."

The whole room joined in a merry laugh. The street piano had come round to the front door of

the building, and its lively tune set Mrs. Drule to beating time with her foot.

Weyland imposed silence on them all by raising his hand.

"I am not going to make a speech," he said. "But I want to thank you for coming. I would take all of you over to Rickers and give you a big dinner, but I can't dine merrily with my little one speeding away. They have only a few minutes to catch their train and the carriage is ready."

Everyone descended to the entrance below. Mrs. McGowan brought out a little bag of rice and Ellerton got ready to throw it after the couple as they went out.

Chester looked prouder and younger than ever as he came down the steps with his bride. As she said farewell to Muriel she kissed her, and Wilmot, standing near, heard her whisper:

"We have already become such good friends. Now, don't forget your promise to visit me before going South."

Muriel said she would remember. The couple stepped into the carriage, and under a shower of rice from Ellerton's energetic hands the four-wheeler rolled away. Another immediately took its place and the driver jumped down from his seat and opened the door.

"Oh, I confess I was about to forget you!" exclaimed Weyland to Muriel. "This is your carriage. Chester gave me most explicit instructions to give you over into Burian's charge. He knew I would be too badly shaken up to take care of even a pretty girl."

"Mr. Burian will be quite equal to it, whether the girl is pretty or not," smiled Muriel.

"Are you ready?" asked Wilmot, eagerly. He would not have volunteered to escort her home, but now that Chester had, with such evident good will, arranged it, he felt blissfully irresponsible—joyously reckless. He was tingling all over with delight at the prospect of that brief possession of her, despite the consequences. He hardly heard anything else that was said. It seemed to him needlessly long—Muriel's handshaking with Weyland and her exchange of cold platitudes with Mrs. Langdon.

"I have heard much of your voice at the Galatin," said Mrs. Langdon. "Those who have heard you sing tell me you undoubtedly have a future before you. "You must come to my Thursday Afternoons in my rooms," she continued. "Very often I have the best talent in the city. Singers have told me that my 'At Homes' bring them very quickly into notice."

"Thank you," said Muriel, still coldly.

"You perhaps know of my newspaper work," ran on Mrs. Langdon. "You must let me have your photograph and some data about yourself. A good write-up in my column would help you materially. I seldom make such a suggestion, but you really have a promising future."

"You are very kind," said Muriel, in no little embarrassment; "but I am not ready to sing before the general public yet, and my father and mother would not care to see my name and picture in the papers."

CHAPTER XXVI.

WILMOT led Muriel to the carriage and they whirled away. He was so full of happiness—short-lived though he knew it would be—that he was simply content to sit and realize that they were near together—that he and she were enclosed by such narrow walls, and all alone.

The carriage rolled smoothly over the asphalt pavement. The street lights now and then threw faint rays into their faces.

"Are you angry with me, Wilmot?" Muriel questioned in a low voice.

"For what?" he asked, struggling to rise sufficiently above the flood of bliss in which he was submerged to grasp her meaning.

"For allowing Mr. Chester to entrap you this way. It would have been easy for me to have made some excuse and released you. It's all my fault."

"I adore him for it. He is a brick, Muriel. It is wrong I know, under the circumstances, but I was famishing to see you, if only for a moment."

The clatter of passing vehicles was so loud that she was obliged to put her head very near his own to hear what he said.

"And do you think I have not wanted to see you, Wilmot? Oh, I could never tell you how I have suffered! Coming to New York while you were here was my dream. To be here with you and see you often and hear you tell about your ups and downs in your work, to have met your friends and entered the life you loved so much would have been joy to me, but as it is, I simply have no right to you. You belong to another, and that other! Oh, Wilmot, she can not give you what God intended to bless you with—genuine happiness. She can not, Wilmot! I have thought over it night after night, day after day, till I am almost mad. Don't think me forward. It is not for myself I am pleading, but for you—yourself—your future, which we have talked about so much in the past."

"I can see no way out of it, darling," he said. "I did not realize what I was doing. I confess—"

"I know exactly how it happened," broke in the girl, her voice filling with determination. "I know how it was. It was a generous impulse on your part. She had done so much for you in a disinterested way, helping you with your book, helping you with money when your father was in such trouble. You needn't explain. I know all about it. I see it as clearly as if I had been there."

"I am glad you do understand it, Muriel," he said, taking her hand and pressing it. "If you had thought me—you understand—if you had misjudged me I'd never have stood it as long as I have. After all, the knowledge that I still have your friendship—your pity has kept me up."

They were both silent for a moment and then he burst out impulsively:

"I am going to simply leave it to you, dear little girl," he said recklessly. "I have made a fool of myself, but it lies with you to direct my course. I put myself in your hands. If you say so, I'll never visit her again. I'll write and break the engagement to-night."

Muriel started and then was silent. They would soon be at the Galatin. Their interview would be over in a moment. He saw, in the flash from a brilliantly lighted shop window, that she was pale and quivering. She drew her hand from his clasp, and put it to her face and leaned forward, her elbows on her knees. Presently she looked up.

"I have pictured to myself many times lately that you might put the responsibilty on me like this, and every time I have said that I would advise you to leave her, but I simply can not do it now. God never seems to bless things asked for in a selfish spirit—and this would be selfish."

She was silent for another moment. He made an effort to regain her hand, but she firmly pressed it down in her lap.

"Wilmot, you remember you kissed me good-bye that night in Dadeville?"

"As if I could forget it!"

"Well, ever since then there has really seemed to be a sacred bond between us. No other man ever kissed me, Wilmot."

"I know that, Muriel."

"Have you ever kissed—her, Wilmot?"

"Never, nor shall I as long as God lets me live!"

Ahead of them they could see the line of cabs and carriages drawn up in front of the Galatin.

"I am going to leave it with God," said Muriel. "I have been praying that he would make something happen to save you and I shall continue to do so. I believe to-night that my prayer will be answered."

The horses had stopped in front of the wide entrance of the hotel. Wilmot opened the door of the carriage and helped her up the stone steps. His emotions had so overcome him that he could not trust his voice to utterance. He only doffed his hat and bowed. Then he re-entered the carriage and was driven back to his rooms.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE next morning Wilmot sorely missed the companionship of Chester as he went down alone to the café. He had not thought his friend's departure would pierce his heart so keenly. As he was returning to his room he saw the postman delivering letters to Mrs. McGowan. Two were for him. One was an acceptance of a short story by the *Decade*. The other was from his father. He opened it as he walked towards Madison Square.

"Dear Wilmot," the letter said, "Mr. Denison left yesterday for New York. He will be at the Lester House. Go down and see him as soon as you get this, for I have intrusted a thousand dollars to him for you. I sold him the remainder of my cotton factory stock at a good round profit. It had been up as collateral security for money borrowed by me, but the mill declared a remarkably big dividend last week and my stock almost doubled in value. This puts me out of debt, and I owe my salvation to you. I don't know how I may have embarrassed you by taking this money, so I make haste to return it."

The letter was filled with news from home, and expressions of love and gratitude, but Wilmot could hardly read it through for his satisfaction over the news regarding the money. He would now be able to return Mrs. Sennett's loan.

He did not sit down in the park as he had at first intended, but set up a brisk pace down Broadway. Reaching the Lester House about ten o'clock, he was told that Mr. Denison had gone out and would return at noon. Wilmot waited round the hotel till noon, but still the Dadeville merchant did not come.

About four o'clock in the afternoon Mr. Denison appeared.

"I am awfully sorry to have kept you waiting," he apologized, "but I was busy making some selections in my line up town, and forgot that you might call. Here is that money, young man. It's a wonder I have not been robbed of it. I have been in the thickest of crowds."

Wilmot took the large envelope.

"It was very good of you to bring it," he said.

Then Mr. Denison would have him go up to his room, and they remained there talking over the news in Dadeville till six o'clock. When Wilmot reached home it was growing dark.

He found a message from Mrs. Sennett, which ran as follows:

"Be sure to come this evening; I have a request to make."

He went up to dress. He was glad of an excuse to call so early, for he wanted to give her the money he had just received.

"I could not explain in my message," she remarked as she came to greet him; "but I must have an escort this evening."

"Where do you wish to go?" he asked.

"Oh, not far," she laughed. "It is only down stairs. A madame somebody is going to give a swell musicale."

"Madame Angier?" he asked, his heart sinking.

"That's the name, do you know her?"

"I met her only once," he replied. "She is the teacher of my friend—of a young lady from down home—Miss Fairchild."

"I didn't know she was a friend of yours," said Mrs. Sennett. "She seems such a nice girl—a perfect lady in every way. She has become quite the rage in the house. The Misses Van Tauber have taken her up and to be a favorite in that quarter is all that is necessary to social success."

He was glad to hear the maid call to her from her dressing-room at that moment. He did not want to talk about Muriel. He sat down at an open window and looked out on Fifth avenue. He was wondering if Muriel would sing during the evening. He told himself that he would flatly refuse to escort Mrs. Sennett to the affair.

Then he remembered the money his father had sent.

He took the package of bank bills from his pocket. He would lose no time in paying the odious debt. To feel that he did not owe her a cent would restore to him a part, if not all, of his lost self-respect. She came in at that moment rubbing on a pair of long white gloves.

"I have a little matter of business to settle with you, Mrs. Sennett," he remarked.

"Business? The idea!"

He laid the bank notes on the table. My father has sent me the money you were kind enough to advance, I need not tell you how grateful I am for the use of it."

For the first time he saw her show genuine anger.

"I don't want it!" she said, her eyes flashing.

"I am sorry," he replied, "neither do I—at present."

The playful tone with which he ended his retort seemed to mollify her.

"You'd make a saint angry," she said. "Just when one is beginning to hope that one can help you a little, you spoil everything with vulgar cash settlements. Come, let's go down. I hear the orchestra."

She opened the drawer of a brass-trimmed Louis Quinze writing desk and carelessly dropping the money into it, she turned the key.

"I am sorry I cannot go with you," he said, rising and taking his hat.

"Why not?"

He hesitated just an instant.

"I am going elsewhere."

"But I need you," a troubled look was on her powdered face. She sat down heavily and continued to rub on her gloves. The truth is, Wilmot, if there was ever a time you should stand by me it is to-night."

"I don't understand."

She leaned towards him anxiously.

"Cards were sent by Madame Angier, or someone acting for her, to all the ladies in the house except myself. I was not going to be insulted in that way. I applied to the landlord, reminding him that the recitals in his house had always been free to guests and threatening to leave at once. He arranged it," Mrs. Sennett's tone had grown hard. "I have it from a reliable quarter that he gave Madame Angier to understand that if she began sowing discord under his roof he would pack her out bag and baggage. He only lets her remain because she is a drawing

card with her entertainments. At any rate I received an invitation late this afternoon. Now, you see why I need you. If you accompany me it will be a public confirmation of the report that we are engaged, which I understand is being doubted, and I shall have the decided advantage over them all."

Wilmot was hot and cold by turns. When he spoke his voice rang out, firm and clear.

"I must absolutely decline to go," he said. "I have pledged myself to marry you, and I am still ready to fulfill my agreement, but, in the meantime, I shall not contract to exhibit myself to gratify any whim of yours."

Mrs. Sennett glared, beside herself with mingled disappointment and fury.

"You won't? Then, pray, what earthly use are you to me?"

"I declare I have never been able to find out," with a satirical laugh. "You might have bought a man who would have been more easily molded to your purpose."

"I see you are trying to quarrel with me, but I shall not let you. There!" gasped the widow, in a brave effort to appear satisfied with his ultimatum.

Wilmot drew one of the fragile goldleaf chairs

to him and leaned on it, he was looking straight into Mrs. Sennett's eyes, thinking of what Muriel had said about her praying to God to prevent his marriage, and wondering if what he was about to say were inspired by a higher power than himself.

"Mrs. Sennett," he said. "It may be late to say it, but there should be no secrets between two people who have agreed to get married. To be frank—more frank than I ever thought I could be to any woman—I must say I think we have made a mistake. We are not suited to each other. When I agreed to marry you I was acting under the high pressure of blind gratitude. Indeed had Mrs. Langdon not burst upon us so suddenly I think I should have decided before leaving you that afternoon that marriage would not be wise between us. If there is any honorable way to—"

"I shall not listen to you!" broke in Mrs. Sennett, deathly pale. You are angry. I have offended you. Let's stop quarreling. I simply can not give you up. Think of all I have done for you—think of what a disagreeable light I shall be placed in. I made a fool of myself once before the public—you will not let them laugh at me again, Wilmot? Surely—" Hot tears were springing into her eyes and her voice broke in a sob.

Wilmot's head went down. He could not help pitying her. His decision was not long delayed.

"No," he said resignedly, "they shall not ridicule you for what I have done. I don't think I can ever do my whole duty as your husband, but I have nothing to say, further than that I want you to think it all over. The opinions of the public ought not to weigh more than our own best judgment."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HE went down the stairway instead of taking the elevator, and in pursuing this course found himself, when the ground floor was reached, in the office of the hotel. Hearing music on his right, and seeing a group of men at an open doorway, he paused and looked in.

As he had supposed, it was the salon where the musicale was to take place. An Italian pianist was seated at the grand piano, his bushy head almost touched by the branches of the palms. He was striking the key of G for the benefit of a round-faced German who was tuning a cello between his knees.

Over the heads of the men in front of him, Wilmot saw a room filled with people in evening dress. At first he could not see Muriel, but finally descried her with Madame Angier and several stylishly attired young ladies near the piano. The sight of her caused him to recoil. He did not want her to see him there, and yet he had an overpowering desire to hear her sing—to see her stand out before all that chattering assemblage. He knew they would admire and applaud, and he wanted to exult in her popularity. Never had he

magnified his unworthiness as now. She was really the star of the evening, the most popular person in the house, while he had not even the social right to sit before her.

"That's her," remarked a man to another near him. "You know the Misses Van Tauber, don't you?"

The individual addressed said he did.

"Well," went on the informant, "she is right between the two, next to the handsome lady, her teacher. She can sing. Just wait till she opens her mouth."

The room was fast filling. Wilmot saw Dorothea Langdon come in at a door which opened into the ball-room on the left and sit down alone. He saw her steadily eying Muriel, and the glance had the desired effect, for the girl turned and smiled and bowed. Even at that distance, Wilmot could see the faint glow of gratification that passed over the tired face of the newspaper woman.

"Hello, what are you doing here?" Wilmot felt a hand on his arm. It was Frank Harrison.

"Only stopped a moment," answered Wilmot.

"Going in?"

"No."

Harrison hesitated.

"I want to speak to you. Come into the smoking-room."

Wilmot saw that he was looking downcast and troubled, and instantly divined the cause. He followed the poet across the hall into the room lighted by many gas-jets under red shades.

"Sit down," said Harrison, extending a cigar. "Smoke?"

"No, thanks."

"I understand you were at the little affair last night," said Harrison. He struck a match and held the flame to his cigar. Despite his faultless dress, he had never appeared to such a bad advantage. His eyes were shot with blood and his skin was yellow. His hands shook.

"Yes, I was best man," answered Wilmot, the words giving him satisfaction, for he disliked the poet.

Harrison pulled at his cigar, held his lips together and let the smoke slowly escape through his nose.

"It must have been a hurried affair, eh?"

"It was, rather."

"A surprise to you, too, then?"

"I didn't know it would come off so soon."

"For the last week I have been prepared—I mean," quickly corrected the smoker, "that I

suspected something might eventually happen in that quarter, but when I heard that it was to take place last night, well, it rather took me off my feet." "She's a nice girl, but, Burian, do you think she—really do you—don't you think she might have done better?"

"Not in our house," answered Wilmot with emphasis, for he understood the disparaging insinuation against his friend. "Chester was decidedly the best man among us. I want you to know I think that, Harrison."

"Oh, you think so?" with a shrug. "Well, Burian, you are welcome to your opinion. I think she might have done better, don't you know, for she is a mighty fine woman."

Wilmot rose. He was in no humor for arguing with Harrison or soothing his vanity. He was too despondent himself to spend sympathy on a man whom he did not like any more than he did Harrison.

The celloist had begun to play Bach's "Adagio" to the accompaniment of the pianist.

"I'm going in," said Harrison, dropping his cigar into an ash-receiver. "I know the Misses Van Tauber."

Wilmot paused at the door of the salon. He saw Harrison make his way to a chair near the

Misses Van Tauber. They greeted him with welcoming smiles and introduced him to Muriel.

Again the oppressive sense of inferiority descended upon Burian. A celebrated tenor was going to sing. Wilmot wandered aimlessly through the adjoining reading and writing-rooms, and when he heard a loud clapping of hands he returned to the salon. Madame Angier was at the piano and Muriel was standing before the audience sweetly bowing in recognition of the greeting. Wilmot held his breath when she began to sing. Her self-possession, beauty and innate dignity thrilled him. Her vocal power astonished him, too. He had heard her sing at home, but she had told him that she never sang half so well as when under the inspiration of her teacher, and in a room large enough to give her voice full compass.

"*Mon cœur, souvre à ta voix*," was the song she sang, and so completely was Wilmot dominated by the clear, sweet quality of her voice that the social barrier between them seemed swept away. As he looked at her across the vast expanse of elaborate gowns and waving fans he saw only the pretty little miss he had first admired in short dresses and braided hair going to and from school past the law office where he was studying. Then the salient events of their later

friendship, and exchange of hopes and plans for the great future blazed before him as clearly as stars in a black sky. With a sharp pain at heart he said to himself: "How beautiful! She was mine—mine—till I lost her! Oh, God, till I lost her!"

The song was over. Its last lingering notes died in a breathless room. The singer calmly folded her music, and with eyes modestly downcast moved back to her chair between the Misses Van Tauber, who were blinking elatedly in the reflected light of their companion's success. The applause was deafening. It died down finally and then rose into a storm again. Madame Angier was smiling adoringly at her pupil, and with her eyes suggesting an encore. Frank Harrison and the Misses Van Tauber invited her by word of mouth; the former would evidently have conducted her to the piano had there been any need of his services.

Her encore was "Way Down Upon the Suwanee River," a song that Wilmot had heard from his cradle up, but never with such heavenly melody and infinite pathos as to-night. If he could have died then and ended the hopeless agony of his darkened life he would have accepted that decree of fate. He was tired of the struggle

to keep intact his ideal of an honorable man. All the powers of the seen and unseen universe seemed to have joined forces to overthrow him. The room seemed to grow misty before his sight. He turned away even before the song was finished, and like a man drunk from despair, he hurried out into the night.

"Cab, sir? Cab, sir?" cried a number of uniformed creatures from their high seats, but he plunged on down the street as if fleeing from some unseen foe. At the corner he turned and looked up at the lighted windows of Mrs. Sennett's apartments, then he groaned, ground his teeth, clenched his hands and plunged on again.

As he lay in bed that night he recalled what Muriel had said about praying that his marriage to Mrs. Sennett might not take place, and he got up and knelt by his bedside, but it had been a long time since he had framed any of his numerous petitions in words and he found himself unable to pray.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ONE afternoon a week later, Mrs. Langdon went to an exhibition of pictures in the gallery of the Water-color Club. Her purpose was to make a list of the best and most promising things for a critical write-up in the *Advance*. Art was not really her line so she depended largely for her opinion on what was said in the catalogue about the respective artists. She was standing before the picture of a "Lady in Brown," which had been considered sufficiently noteworthy to deserve special mention, and a half-tone reproduction, when Muriel Fairchild and the Misses Van Tauber entered the room.

Mrs. Langdon closed her notebook and transferred her attention from the picture to the girl whom she had admired ever since Muriel had refused to allow her portrait to appear in the *Advance*. Muriel recalled to her mind a misty ideal she had created for herself before the greed for notoriety had taken hold of her. She told herself it did one good to look at a creature so young, so genuine, so unspoiled.

The three girls had paused on the opposite side of the room to look at a picture, but it had

not the power to hold the sad-eyed attention of Muriel.

Mrs. Langdon caught her glance, and while she held it, she determined she would not be the first to bow, and wondered if Muriel would again recognize her. To her surprise, the girl smiled, nodded, and excusing herself from her companions, came directly to her.

"I was so sorry not to have been in when you called the other day, Mrs. Langdon," she said, holding out her hand. "I had gone to a matinee."

"I was sorry to miss you," returned the newspaper woman sincerely. "Really I was just a little afraid you would not care to see me."

"I—I don't understand," stammered Muriel, somewhat embarrassed.

Mrs. Langdon laughed and glanced towards the Misses Van Tauber whose straight backs could be seen going through the doorway of the next room.

"I was afraid you might be a little under the influence of those ultra fashionable friends of yours, who, I think, may look down on my calling."

"I don't know how they regard such things," returned Muriel, quite inadequate to the situation, "but I am sure I have not taken such an unjust view."

Mrs. Langdon fumbled with her notebook for a moment, and then she said:

"I am fond of being perfectly truthful and frank, at least, occasionally, Miss Fairchild, and I am going to confess it was really a sort of guilty feeling that made me fancy you might not want to meet me again."

"I am still in the dark," said Muriel, smiling.

"You see," explained Mrs. Langdon, "when I saw you at the wedding the other night I noticed how agitated Mr. Burian seemed by your presence and later I discovered that he was an old friend of yours."

"Yes?" murmured the girl, still mystified.

"I could not help seeing that you like him, sympathize with him, and all that, and I did not see how you could forgive me for what I wrote about his engagement."

"Oh!" exclaimed Muriel, "I begin to understand. I did not, however, know you did that. Oh, how could you?"

Mrs. Langdon drew her to a seat.

"Sit down with me just a moment," she said, tremulously. "I want to try to explain—to justify myself a little if I can. It looks like a very mean thing, but still—"

Mrs. Langdon went no further.

"But still—" suggested Muriel, firmly.

"I really thought it would be the means of bringing him to his senses," went on the newspaper woman. "My method would have succeeded with nine men out of ten, and I can't tell now why it failed to work with Mr. Burian. He can't be in love with her; it is absurd! But that afternoon when she announced their engagement to me in his presence I saw his danger. I had met him, and liked him, and predicted his success; but when I saw she had trapped him I thought a sharp bit of public ridicule would bring him to his senses, and that the engagement would be broken."

"A man as honorable as he would never forsake a woman under such circumstances," said Muriel. "He may have entered the engagement impulsively, and might have withdrawn from it, if the affair had not been made public, but he would never do so after the publicity you gave the matter."

"Ah, I see; I had not thought of that!" cried Mrs. Langdon. "Well, I do sincerely admire him now."

"He felt very grateful towards her, too," added Muriel.

"Grateful!" exclaimed Mrs. Langdon with a

start. "Do you mean that she helped him—that she advanced money?"

Muriel was silent, the blood mantling her brow. She had said more than she intended, but it had been only through her intense desire to justify Wilmot.

"Ah, how contemptible!" cried Mrs. Langdon. "I see the whole thing now. She resorted to her old trick of using her dead husband's earnings, to promote her—"

"I did not say that," interrupted the girl.

"I know you did not, my dear!" smiled Mrs. Langdon, patting Muriel's hand. "I discovered it myself. I remember now I did hear that Mr. Burian was short of funds and could get no one to accept his stories. Poor fellow! and I have been holding him up to ridicule."

Dorothea rose. "I see your friends looking for you," she ended. "I know I am keeping you." Mrs. Langdon went back to the "Lady in Brown" and opened her notebook, but her fingers trembled. She broke the point of her pencil.

"I am no earthly good when I am angry," she said to herself. "I shall simply *have* to see that woman before I can write a line or feel at all like myself. Poor girl! What a lady she is, and how she does love him! I have been cruel—really cruel."

CHAPTER XXX.

"I WAS afraid I'd find Mr. Burian here," Mrs. Langdon remarked as she sat down in Mrs. Sennett's drawing-room twenty minutes later. Her cheeks were flushed from a rapid cab-drive, and she looked younger than usual.

"No, I hardly expect him," answered Mrs. Sennett languidly. "He used to come every afternoon about this time, until—"

Mrs. Sennett's hesitation was just long enough for her visitor to interpolate an ending to her remark.

"Until you became engaged! Significant, isn't it?"

Mrs. Sennett was in the act of sitting down on an ottoman near Mrs. Langdon. She finished the movement with a drop of at least a foot. Her diamond ear-rings swung wildly to and fro.

"What do you mean, Dolly?" she asked.

"For gracious sake don't call me Dolly! I can't stand it from women, besides I have come to have it out with you." Mrs. Langdon thrust the end of her parasol into the ear of a tiger-skin, and leaned on it.

"To have it out with me?"

"Yes, the whole business of your engagement to that boy. The cowardly part I took in it has so effected my nerves and conscience that I am all done up. I have discovered that Burian and Miss Fairchild are old sweethearts, and that with your silly craze for Fauntleroy lovers and my love for sensational articles and tendency to vituperative spite, they have been parted. She is a noble young woman, and he is a man with a future, but your engagement to him has broken her heart, and blocked his progress."

"Blocked his progress!" gasped Mrs. Sennett, quivering from head to foot, a blended light of fear and anger in her eyes.

"Yes, King and Burton are holding back his book because of the publicity of the whole thing. I happen to know that."

Mrs. Sennett rose to her feet and stood erect.

"Dorothea Langdon, be careful what you say!" she blurted out. "You have already taken too many liberties with my name and character. Mr. Burian asked me to marry him of his own free will, and—"

"How could he do otherwise, with that obligation hanging over him, and your prating about your loneliness, breaking heart, and all the rest of that sickening twaddle?"

"Obligation?" repeated Mrs. Sennett slowly and softly, as if afraid of her own voice.

"Yes, you know you advanced money to him; you needn't deny it!"

"Who told you that?"

"I don't care to say," replied Mrs. Langdon.

"He has paid me every cent I ever loaned him," said Mrs. Sennett, struggling into a show of indignation. "I presume you will publish a statement that he was bought, as you did when Mr. Printup and I were engaged."

"I'll publish nothing that will harm you if you'll be sensible," said Mrs. Langdon. "You may as well listen to me, you know, for I have made up my mind to gain my point."

Mrs. Sennett summoned up the courage to point dramatically towards the door.

"You'd better go, Mrs. Langdon," she said. "I have heard quite enough."

"But I really am not through with you," calmly said the member of the Woman's Press Club, and she made a thrust at the glass eye of the tiger-head by way of emphasis. "The truth is, we are both in a contemptible mess, unworthy of women of your age and my experience. Now, if you will listen to me, I will show you how we can both get out gracefully."

Mrs. Sennett confessed her defeat when her extended arm sank slowly to her side.

"I don't follow you," she said.

"I am weary of being rough on human beings," said Mrs. Langdon, with a half smiling look at her weak sister. "People are beginning to say my articles have their origin only in envy and spite. It is detrimental to my ambition, and I really dislike to contemplate what I shall have to rake up and say about you if you defy me in this. Without boasting, I could make your name a street-corner and house-hold joke from Maine to California."

Mrs. Sennett sank back on her ottoman. She was panting as if she had scrubbed a flight of stairs.

"What do you want of me?" she asked, in utter helplessness.

"The simplest thing in the world," was the reply. "All you will have to do will be to write Mr. Burian that you have thought the matter over, and decided that the disparity in your ages makes it advisable for you to break off the engagement."

"Your plan is to force me to do this?"

"You were forced to give up 'Printy,' you know, and what credit did you ever derive from that?"

Mrs. Sennett squirmed on the ottoman.

"But what you have already said in print has done Mr. Burian the injury, if injury has been done," she ventured.

"If the engagement is broken, I can retract what I have said," continued Mrs. Langdon. "I have never taken back-water in my life, but for the sake of this young couple and their happiness, I am willing, for once, to acknowledge that I had been misinformed in regard to the engagement. Along with this statement, I should give him such a booming mention as a writer, that no one would, for a moment, credit the report that such a man had thought seriously of marrying a woman like—well, anybody for her money."

Mrs. Sennett rested her elbows on her knees and buried her face in her hands. For a moment neither spoke, then Mrs. Sennett looked up.

"You have misjudged me all along," she said with a sudden firmness that surprised the visitor. "I know I have seemed a fool, Mrs. Langdon; and because I made such an idiot of myself with Mr. Printup you thought I was going to do the same again. You must hear me out. I am determined not to be misunderstood, and to lay part of the blame at your door, too."

"At my door!" Mrs. Langdon sneered aloud.

"Yes, at your door!" I acknowledge I did enjoy having Mr. Burian come and talk over his hopes. It was like going over the best part of my youth again, and besides I was longing for a chance to aid him materially. I confess I led him on to proposing, and that he did it in an impulsive moment, but as God is my Lord and Master, Mrs. Langdon, I was not going to bind him to it. I should have shown him the futility of it that very afternoon if you had not burst in upon us and roused the worst side of my nature by your keen ridicule in his presence. You drove me to the announcement of the engagement. I was nearly dead with shame and mortification when I saw your article the next morning and knew the world was stamping me again with that old weakness for which it has lashed me in the face a million times. I was tempted then to boldly fight it out —to hold Mr. Burian to his thoughtless proposal, but I was going to release him this very day. I talked with him about it the last time he was here and made up my mind to bury my foolish pride and release him, but oh! you made it so hard—so very hard for a woman, Mrs. Langdon—a woman who was once as popular with men as I was, when all Newport—"

The speaker covered her face and began to cry.

Mrs. Langdon, leaned forward, as stiff and still as the wall behind her.

"I see it all now," she said. "Yes, I see it plainly, Mrs. Sennett. Nine proud women out of ten would have done as you have under the same circumstances. Yes, it was all due to my spite--my venomous pen, and I feel as if I can never be forgiven or regain my self-respect."

She stood up and with an incongruous glance looked down on the sobbing woman.

"You have been more generous than I, Mrs. Sennett," she faltered. "You have not pried into my heart as I have into yours. If you had you might have discovered the cause of all my ridicule. It was all due to the fact, Mrs. Sennett, that I, too, am growing old. Men don't care for me as they once did. They follow me now for puffs—advertisement—that's all. Now you understand. In your conduct I saw what I was coming to."

Mrs. Sennett rose to her feet, and the two women stood facing each other. "You are a real good woman, Dolly," said Mrs. Sennett, "and I shall always love you—now." The newspaper woman drew her wraps about her.

"I shall set the whole thing right to-morrow," she said. "I know how to do it—let that be my apology. I write better than I talk, besides I feel like crying. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE following morning Wilmot received this communication from Mrs. Sennett:

"My dear Mr. Burian:

"Mrs. Langdon has brought me to my senses with one of her straight talks. For some time the truth has been dawning on me that the disparity in our ages renders us unsuited to each other, but I was simply too weak and foolish to admit the truth to myself. I see, too, that you would simply never consent to live on my means, and situated as we both are, it would be hard to effect a compromise that would be agreeable. I love travel, luxurious surroundings, and everything money can secure, but your pride would keep you from enjoying these things with me. The whole affair was a mistake, and I hope you will release me from the engagement. Dorothea has agreed to straighten the matter out, by acknowledging in the *Advance* that she was misinformed, and that there is nothing between us except friendship. I hope you won't object to this 'white lie' for it will do away with the gossip quicker than anything else. I have a letter from my sister in San Francisco begging me to visit her and I shall leave to-morrow. Perhaps you'd better not call again."

Wilmot did not read the letter through, then, but dropped it on his table, and turned to a window. "Free! Free!" he exclaimed. "Thank

God, I am actually a free man, with the world—the whole world before me."

Obeying an uncontrollable impulse to feel the expanse of limitless space above him, he put on his hat and went down for a walk. Passing a news-stand on the corner he caught sight of a copy of the *Advance* and purchased it. Mrs. Langdon's article was there ; he saw his name in bold letters among the headlines. She had written beautifully, and so plausibly that its veracity could not have been questioned by anyone. This was followed by a few words in Mrs. Sennett's favor, and a column of enthusiastic praise of Wilmot as a writer of rare ability and promise. Wilmot walked on and sat down in Madison Square, conscious now of but one desire, that Muriel Fairchild should at once see the article, understand Mrs. Langdon's motive in writing it, and rejoice with him.

For one instant the possibility of eventually winning Muriel flashed into his mind, but he tried to subdue it. He did not want to meet her now; he really hoped he should not see her till the present sensation had passed out of the memory of everyone. Yes, he would avoid her now for awhile at least, as persistently as before. People should not have the slightest cause to connect her name with his, after the publicity into which his thoughtlessness had brought him.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"WELL, what do you think of that?" said Richard Soul to the senior member of the firm who had entered the office, reading the *Advance*.

"I'm afraid we have treated the young man with undue haste—in fact, pretty shabbily," answered Mr. King. "I confess it was my fault. I am an old fogy and I needn't deny it."

"What do you think we ought to do about it?" asked Soul.

Mr. King met the question with another.

"What excuse did you give for the postponement?"

"None at all."

"And what sort of reply did you get from him?"

"None at all."

"Good! I like his pluck. I have just re-read his book. It is great! I like his style. I was just thinking he would make our paper a good London correspondent."

The manager started in surprise.

"I had not thought of that, but I believe you are right. It wouldn't take such a chap long to get into harness over there."

"Do you suppose he could be had?"

"I think he would jump at it. Frank Harrison told Lester he was really seeking a position."

Mr. King deliberated a moment, then, as if relieved, he said:

"Write to him to call, and talk the matter over; he may not care to leave America, but we can make him an offer. How soon can you get his book under way?"

"Immediately, I have just been talking to the foreman."

Mr. King laughed.

"Oh, you were—so you thought, we ought to be expeditious?"

"I think it would be a good time to launch him. Everything that is said will now be in his favor, and Mrs. Langdon's article will prepare the critics for something beyond the average."

That afternoon Wilmot called in response to Soul's telegram. The manager was suavely polite.

"I wanted to see you about the publication of your book," he said. "We are sorry for the delay, but it was unavoidable."

"It really makes no difference," replied the author. "If you do not care to use it, I will take the manuscript away."

"Oh, it wasn't that!" hastily corrected the manager; "we have already given the book to our printer, and booming announcements have gone to the newspapers all over the country. I sent for you to consult you about the title page, the quality of paper, the size and general style of the book. We study to please an author as well as his readers. You see, we want you to be one of us, and hope you'll give us the right to bring out your next book."

"I can't do that," answered Wilmot, firmly.

"You can not?" The note of surprise in Soul's voice was very distinct.

"I shall make no such promise to any one," declared Wilmot.

The manager stirred restlessly in his chair.

"You mean you would refuse to allow us to handle your next novel?"

"If I write another, yes."

"I see," said Soul, "you are blaming us for the delay."

"Not at all; you were only looking after your interests, I want to look out for mine. In the future, I shall not contract with any firm that is likely to withhold my work from the public because of any newspaper report about my private affairs."

The manager shrugged his shoulders and fingered his paper-weight nervously. He touched the button of an electric call-bell.

"Tell Mr. King to step here," he said to the office-boy.

Mr. King came in, and shook hands with Wilmot.

"Mr. Burian is a little too much for me," Soul admitted with a smile. "He feels hurt about our delay and ascribes it to that unpleasant rumor."

Mr. King flushed to the roots of his white hair.

"No one is so much to blame as I am," he said in an embarrassed tone. "I confess I did not like to bring out a man right on the heels of such a—well, such a sensation as that. I am sorry to have caused you inconvenience, and am ready to make all the amends possible."

It was the gray head, the quavering voice that appealed to Wilmot's better nature.

"Don't say anything more about it," he said. "When I have written another book you shall see it, and we will talk it over."

"Good," exclaimed Mr. King, laying his hand on Wilmot's shoulder. "You and I shall yet be friends."

He turned to Soul. "Have you mentioned the London idea to him?" he asked.

The manager shook his head and entered on a rather lengthy explanation.

"It would be just the thing for you," broke in Mr. King impulsively, when Soul had concluded. "We own the *Literary Day* you know, and need a regular correspondent over there. The salary is not great, but it would cover your expenses, and you would have ample time for other work."

"I can think of nothing I should like more." admitted Wilmot, and then his face clouded. "I am afraid it would be hard for me to keep going until I get established over there. You see I have earned very little, so far."

"We can easily get round that," said the old man. "We often make a payment of royalty in advance on a promising book, and we can easily give you two or three hundred on account."

"Then I accept your offer," answered Wilmot.

"Can you be ready to sail in a week?" Mr. King asked, as he grasped Wilmot's hand.

"Easily," was the reply.

When Wilmot had gone, Mr. King looked into Soul's office. "I like him better than ever," he said, smiling. "He will do us credit over there—you can depend upon it!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THAT evening Wilmot went up to Weyland's studio and told him of his good fortune. The artist was sitting in a reclining-chair smoking, and sprang up and extended his big hand.

"I congratulate you with all my heart, my boy," he exclaimed heartily. "I knew it would come. You see I did not listen to that nasty report about you wanting to marry for money. I saw too much 'git there' in that eye of yours to believe such rot. I feel like dancing myself to-night. I never felt so good before."

"Another big order?" questioned Wilmot, as he reclined on a lounge and lighted one of Weyland's cigars.

"Yes, the biggest to me that has come yet. It is an order from my little girl to come post haste to Boston. She says she can't do without her old 'daddy' a bit longer. Louis wants me too. Oh, I'll go, you may bank on that! I have actually been so blue that I didn't have to buy color for my sky-effects. But I'll work when I'm with them again."

"It looks like we are all going to leave," said Wilmot. "Harrison wants to move up town to get into a more stylish locality."

"Harrison ought to," remarked the artist good naturedly. "He goes in for that sort of thing. I wish you were leaving with me."

"I can't, I shall have a great deal to do before sailing," replied Wilmot.

"I'm going to take that charming Miss Fairchild with me," smiled Weyland, rising to get a match.

Wilmot was in the shadow of the artist's big body, which had intervened between him and the light from the piano lamp.

"What?" he exclaimed, unable to restrain his surprise.

"Yes," Weyland came back lighting a cigar. "Those girls have been exchanging letters since Aline left, and Miss Fairchild has promised to go with me over there for a stay of several weeks. I stopped in at the Galatin this afternoon. She will leave with me to-morrow."

After that Wilmot was silent for several minutes then he rose and went down to his room and dressed to go out. He had decided to see Muriel at once. Her intended departure was excuse enough, even if any were needed. His heart was in his mouth all the way to the hotel. He sent up his card from the office and went into one of the private parlors to await her coming.

"At last," she exclaimed, as she came in holding out her hand. "I did hope I'd see you before leaving. I am going to Boston to-morrow."

"So Weyland told me," said Wilmot. "I felt that I must see you before you go, for I leave New York myself in a week."

For a moment the girl stared at him without speaking, then:

"You are going away?"

Then he told her of his appointment and early publication of his book."

Her face was fairly aglow.

"I am so glad!" she exclaimed. "Now, your real day is dawning—the day you and I used to dream about. I can't tell you how happy Mrs. Langdon's article made me. The beauty of her account of Mr. Chester's marriage first showed me what a good heart the woman has and her adroit retraction makes me love her. As soon as I read it, I went to her room and kissed her. She actually cried and presently told me all about her one love affair. It was like a beautiful story. It wasn't with Mr. Langdon, either, but a young man she knew long before she was married. She told me you reminded her of him. Since Mrs. Sennett left and this article appeared everybody is laughing at the absurdity of the first report.

And now that Mrs. Sennett has gone they are telling no end of good deeds of her. The girls in the house are dying to meet you."

The hours flew by. A hall clock struck eleven.

"I want to write to you if you will let me," said Wilmot as he rose to leave. "May I?"

"If you did not I should hardly know how to estimate your friendship. I am going to believe in your future, too, more than ever."

"I shall hope for more than literary success," some day he said, significantly. She went with him to the door—and when they shook hands they both choked up and parted without a word.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ON HIS arrival in London, Wilmot took lodgings in the vicinity of Bedford Square, and wrote and read in the library of the British Museum. As correspondent for the *Literary Day* it was necessary for him to become acquainted with the leading writers and artists of London. At first he received only a lukewarm reception, but six weeks after his arrival, his book being out, the English reviews were enthusiastically proclaiming him the latest American success, his novel having produced a furore at its first appearance, on both sides of the Atlantic. And then he found himself in demand—a lion, a species of creation he had never admired, and liked less now than ever.

He had frequent letters from Muriel and Chester. Chester kept him posted on the news regarding their old associates. In one of his letters he wrote:

"Aline and I of late have seen a good deal of Muriel. She is more popular than ever and just as unspoiled. You'd better look to your interest. Frank Harrison comes over to see her every time she visits us. She has remodeled him. He now places the impoverished aristocracy of

the South above the gilded Four Hundred. If I am any reader of signs, he's a goner. Aline says he is not capable of loving any woman deeply. She doesn't believe Muriel cares a fig for him—though Aline does whisper certain other suspicions, which, as a dutifully married man shall go no further than where they lodged in my head.

"Muriel happened to be with us when the '*Lighthouse*' (a name Chester had given to a most exclusive New York review) came containing that stunning criticism of your book, quoting, also, the praise of the *Academy*. We all read the article together and duly rejoiced. I have never seen such a light in a human face as I then saw in Muriel's. She wouldn't trust herself to speak for several minutes, and then said something so ridiculously irrelevant that Aline and I had to laugh at her. Aline says she is the finest girl ever made, and I'd have you know that my wife has never made a mistake in sizing up a woman—or a man, either, as she once proved to the satisfaction of all who knew her. She—Muriel—won't talk about herself, and I venture she didn't write you of her recent offer. She was tendered the leading soprano part in the Lyceum Opera Company at a large salary, but she refused because her parents object to the stage. She will sing in choirs and select concerts, and that will bring her glory and boodle enough. You need no longer fear gossip about the Sennett affair. It has completely died out. No one now couples your name with hers—thanks to Dorothea, who is constantly printing helpful squibs in your behalf."

The following summer, while making a short stay in Paris, Wilmot met Chester on the Boulevard St. Michael.

"I had no idea you were here," exclaimed Wilmot. "Why didn't you write me you were coming over?"

"I didn't know it myself till the day we sailed," replied Chester. "Weyland had some tickets given him by the owner of the *London*, and Aline and I decided at a moment's notice to use them. She might not have come, but Muriel was booked for the same boat, and really needed a chaperon."

"Oh, she came, too!" ejaculated Wilmot, "but she did not write me."

"She told me she had written to your London address. In fact, we looked for you at the station."

"I missed the letter," said Wilmot. "I have been here several days."

"We were all very much disappointed at not seeing you. When you did not turn up, we supposed the letter had gone astray. I went to your lodgings and could learn nothing but that you had left without giving your address."

"I did not want anyone in London to know where I had gone," explained Wilmot, regretfully. "There are some newspaper men who watch my

movements and publish erroneous statements about my plans."

"I see," answered Chester, pausing and facing his friend after they had crossed the Seine on the *Pont St. Michel*," but we are losing valuable time. The ladies want to see you; we have taken tickets for the night train to Geneva. We don't want to spend another hot night in Paris. Come with us—really you must! We simply won't take a refusal."

Wilmot caught his breath. He really had been thinking of an excursion in that direction.

"I have an important appointment here in the morning," he said, "but I could take the train tomorrow night—that is, if I shan't be in the way."

"In the way? You blockhead! Why, Aline and I have been longing for some one to look after Muriel, and you will do beautifully. Frank Harrison hinted right and left for an invitation, but Muriel wouldn't listen to his coming."

"She doesn't really like him, then?"

"No, and it looks as if the fellow's very persistency has spoiled what little chance he might have had. He bores her frightfully. One night after he had stayed very late Aline and I teased her unmercifully about him. She stood it for a long time, and then flew up and said she only liked

him for one thing, and that was because he had introduced you to your publishers."

"Did she say that—did she really, Chester?"

Chester nodded, as he began to write on the back of his card.

"Here is our address. It is a delightfully quiet and select *pension* in the *Quai des Eaux Vives*—right on the lake. I shall keep an apartment for you. Now come and help me get them to the train."

Wilmot looked at his watch.

"I am afraid I have not the time to spare, I am awfully sorry," he said. "I have a pressing engagement to dine with some English friends at seven, and have now hardly time to dress."

"Well, you won't fail to join us at Geneva day after to-morrow morning," said Chester.

"I shall leave to-morrow night sure," promised Wilmot. And the two friends parted.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CHESTER met Wilmot at the door of the *pension* in Geneva, and actually threw his arms about him, much to the amusement of Marie, the maid, who had come out to direct the placing of the luggage.

"I am awfully glad you got here all right," he cried. "Aline shouted with delight, and Muriel would have joined in if she hadn't been afraid we'd tease her."

"Where are they now?" Wilmot asked as they were entering the salon on the next floor.

"Gone to the flower-market," grinned Chester. "They intended to decorate your room. We had no idea you would get here for an hour yet. I was going to meet you at the station. How do you like Geneva?"

"It is beautiful," answered Wilmot. "I got my first view of Mt. Blanc as we drove up, and the lake is ideal."

"Glad you came, eh?"

"Decidedly."

The ladies returned twenty minutes later, their arms filled with flowers. Wilmot was in the dining-room at *déjeûner* with Chester beside him

asking rapid questions about literary matters in London, and now and then addressing a labored remark to Marie in most wretched French.

Mrs. Chester was the first to enter, and Wilmot was glad it was so, for it gave him a moment to collect himself before facing Muriel.

"I am glad you kept your promise," said Mrs. Chester. "After we heard you would join us to-day, it seemed a long time to wait."

"I have been in special need of you, Burian," said Chester with a droll look at his wife. "I want to prove by you that my French is *comme il faut*, as they say over here. They tried to leave it to Marie, but they could not speak well enough to make her comprehend the point under dispute."

"That's a fib!" said his wife, going behind him and playfully pulling his hair. "I don't pretend to speak it well, but Muriel is simply a marvel. In Paris they all said she spoke like a native; her intonation is so soft and musical."

"*Mais non, pas du tout!*" exclaimed the one complimented, as she entered the room. "Mr. Burian knows I have had no opportunity to acquire any tongue except Georgia dialect. How do you do?" she asked, giving Wilmot her hand cordially. We are so glad you came. It makes me feel like being at home again—my real, sho'

'nough home—to see you. And—and you are really quite a stranger."

Wilmot stood almost speechless before her. She seemed to have become a hundred times more beautiful than when he had last seen her. A dozen replies crowded one upon another in his brain, and when he finally spoke his words seemed weak and inadequate.

"I am glad to see you," he said. "I was lucky to run upon Chester. If I could have gotten away from Paris yesterday I should have come down with you."

"They had seized his luggage for a board bill," said Chester with a straight face, and every body laughed.

"I found it awfully hard to pass the time after finding out that you were so near," said Wilmot, looking at Muriel.

"How nice of you!" said that young lady, sitting down and beginning to arrange her flowers. "And Paris so full of attractions for men especially."

"For some men, perhaps," answered Wilmot; "but not for all. The general lack of seriousness and habit of constant merrymaking on the part of the Parisians make most foreigners realize that there is all the more work to do elsewhere."

"I am so glad you think that," said Mrs. Chester with a mischievous glance at her husband. "It is unusual to hear such sentiments from men, but you are an unmarried man."

"I don't feel at all as if I were hit," laughed Chester.

That evening after dinner, they all sat on the balcony which jutted out from the salon and overlooked the street and the lake.

In the lake, rose a tall fountain, the jet and wide-spreading spray of which were illuminated by colored lights. The *Jardin Anglais* was at the end of the street, and from it, and the *café chantant* beyond, came strains of music. The surface of the lake was dotted with the red, green and blue lanterns of row-boats, and now and then an excursion steamer, like a moving pavilion, glided past.

"Now, you must sing for us, dear," suggested Mrs. Chester, touching Muriel on the shoulder.

Without a word Muriel complied, stepping through the open window into the salon, and sitting down at the piano.

"*Mon cœur, souvre à ta voix*," was the song she selected from a pile of music on the piano, and it vividly and painfully recalled the only occasion on which Wilmot had ever heard it. Dur-

ing the last stanza Mrs. Chester rose and softly left the balcony. She was followed by her husband. Finding himself alone, Wilmot joined Muriel at the piano, just as she was singing the last words. She turned on the stool and glanced in a startled way at the vacant chairs on the balcony.

"I declare," she said, "they showed very little appreciation to leave like that."

"I think they did it out of consideration for me," said Wilmot, feeling his heart sink as he realized the importance of what he had determined to say.

"I don't understand," Muriel began, but the expression of her eyes belied her words as they fell under his ardent, almost apprehensive gaze.

"I think," he said, "that they saw the awful suspense I am in and thought it would be better for me to ascertain my fate at once. Since that miserable affair last summer I have hardly dared hope to win your love. The truth is, I have never been able to keep from loving you. Although I have not seen you for a year, you have been in my thought—in my heart—every moment since—every single moment, Muriel."

He had taken her hand, and the fact that she did not at once withdraw it gave him hope.

"Is it really true that you love me?" she faltered.

"As I never imagined a man could love," said he simply.

"I knew it, but I wanted to hear you say the words," she said, flushing.

"Then you still care for me?"

"Yes; I love you."

Strong as he was, he was afraid to trust his voice to utterance at that moment. In lieu of a reply he only pressed her hand and led her back to their seats outside.

. . . . . .

Ten minutes later their friends emerged from the little reception-room at the far end of the balcony and approached.

"I want to congratulate you both," began Chester, laughing. "I—"

"Why, Louis!" broke in Mrs. Chester, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I congratulate you on having the best seats on the balcony," finished Chester, suppressing another laugh as he glanced towards the fountain. "From here you have a clear view of the *Jardin Anglais* and the lake; we could scarcely see a thing from the other end."

"You can congratulate me on more than that, Chester," said Wilmot, falling into his friend's mood, "and if I hadn't met you in Paris the other day I might—"

"Not have had such a good seat on the balcony," interpolated Chester. "Aline, kiss me; I feel like getting married over again!"

But Mrs. Chester was kissing Muriel.

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